

*Araminta*

*J.C. Snaith*



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ARAMINTA

By J. C. SNAITH

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ARAMINTA  
THE VAN ROON  
THE COUNCIL OF SEVEN  
THE ADVENTUROUS LADY  
THE UNDEFEATED  
THE SAILOR  
THE TIME SPIRIT  
THE COMING  
ANNE FEVERSHAM

---

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY  
Publishers New York

# ARAMINTA

BY

J. C. SNAITH

AUTHOR OF "THE VAN ROON," "THE SAILOR"  
"THE UNDEFEATED," ETC.



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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE OLD WOMAN OF HILL STREET . . . . .	1
II. THE IDEA WHICH CAME TO HER . . . . .	7
III. LORD CHERITON LOOKS IN . . . . .	15
IV. ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST CAUSE OF ALL ROMANCE . . . . .	27
V. THE INSTINCT OF MR. MARCHBANKS BETRAYS HIM . . . . .	35
VI. UNWARRANTABLE BEHAVIOR OF TOBIAS	49
VII. A THROWBACK . . . . .	60
VIII. "CAROLINE CREWKERNE'S GAINSBOR- OUGH" . . . . .	74
IX. IN WHICH CHERITON DROPS HIS UM- BRELLA . . . . .	82
X. JIM LASCELLES MAKES HIS APPEAR- ANCE . . . . .	89
XI. MISS PERRY IS THE SOUL OF DISCRE- TION . . . . .	105
XII. JIM LASCELLES TAKES A DECISIVE STEP	114
XIII. HIGH REVEL IS HELD IN HILL STREET	122
XIV. UNGENTLEMANLIKE BEHAVIOR OF JIM LASCELLES . . . . .	130

CHAPTER	PAGE
XV. DIPLOMACY IS CALLED FOR . . . . .	147
XVI. HYDE PARK . . . . .	153
XVII. STARTLING DEVELOPMENT OF THE FE- MALE US . . . . .	163
XVIII. FASHION COMES TO THE ACACIAS . . . . .	173
XIX. A SOCIAL TRIUMPH . . . . .	183
XX. MISS PERRY HAS HER PALM CROSSED WITH SILVER . . . . .	191
XXI. HIGH DIPLOMACY . . . . .	200
XXII. A CONVERSATION AT WARD'S . . . . .	210
XXIII. MUFFIN MAKES HER APPEARANCE AT PEN-Y-GROS CASTLE . . . . .	218
XXIV. EPISODE OF A FRENCH NOVEL AND A RED UMBRELLA . . . . .	228
XXV. PARIS ON MOUNT IDA . . . . .	241
XXVI. JIM LASCELLES ADDS HEROISM TO HIS OTHER FINE QUALITIES . . . . .	250
XXVII. REVEL IS HELD AT PEN-Y-GROS CASTLE	261
XXVIII. A THUNDERBOLT . . . . .	274
XXIX. JIM LASCELLES WRITES HIS NAME IN THE VISITORS' BOOK . . . . .	282
XXX. GOOD-BY . . . . .	288
XXXI. DISINTEGRATION . . . . .	295
XXXII. BARNE MOOR . . . . .	303
XXXIII. EVERYTHING FOR THE BEST IN THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS . . . . .	310

# ARAMINTA



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## CHAPTER I

### THE OLD WOMAN OF HILL STREET

**A**N old lady who lived in Hill Street, Mayfair, was about to celebrate her seventy-third birthday. It was a quarter to nine in the morning by the ormolu clock on the chimney piece, and Caroline Crewkerne, somewhat shriveled, very wide-awake, and in the absence of her toupee looking remarkably like a macaw, was sitting up in bed. Cushions supported her venerable form, and an Indian shawl, the gift of her sovereign, covered the aged shoulders.

People there were who did not hesitate to describe her as a worldly minded, not to say wicked, old woman. There is no need to asperse the character of one who has always passed as a Christian; let it suffice that her views upon all matters relating to this life were extremely robust, and that years and experience had confirmed her in them. In regard to the life to come she seldom expressed an opinion. No doubt she was wise. Sitting very upright in her bed, with those keen eyes and hawk-like features mistress of all they surveyed, she was enough to put fear in the heart of the boldest. Not that courage was the long suit of Miss Burden, a gentlewoman of a certain age, who sat knitting at the foot of the four-poster. She acted as companion in exchange for board and lodging and the modest sum of sixty pounds a year.

Duly fortified with a slice of dry toast and a cup of strong tea Lady Crewkerne said to her maid, Mottrom, who hovered by the dressing table—

“Please cover my head.”

The command was obeyed with delicacy and with dexterity. Not that the elaborate mechanism which adorned the venerable poll fourteen hours out of the twenty-four was removed from the center of the dressing table. Various ceremonies had to be performed before the moment came for its reception. The maid produced a temporary, but none the less marvelous, erection of fine needlework and point lace, which she proceeded to arrange like a canopy about the brow of Minerva.

“Marchbanks may come in,” said the voice from the bed.

The door opened, and that personage was ushered into the presence. Marchbanks merits a description quite as much as his mistress. Yet how to do justice to him, that is the problem. The poise of his bearing, his urbane reserve, his patrician demeanor were worthy of an ambassador. An air of high diplomacy enveloped his entire being. His most trivial action seemed to raise the ghost of Lord John Russell. Like his venerable mistress, he was a Whig to the core. He had been born, he had been bred, and by the grace of God he was determined to die in that tradition.

In the right hand of Marchbanks was a salver containing the *Morning Post*. It also contained a little pile of rather important-looking correspondence.

With the courtly grace of a bygone age the butler bowed to the occupant of the four-poster—old ladies who live in Hill Street, Berkeley Square, do not put their faith in new furniture—and Lady Crewkerne was pleased to say—

“Good morning, Marchbanks.”

“Good morning, my lady.” The manner of Marchbanks was inimitable. And then said he with an air of benevolence that would have made a considerable fortune in Harley Street: “I trust your ladyship has slept well.”

“As well as one can expect at my age.”

No, Marchbanks did not offer his venerable mistress many happy returns of her birthday, but had he done so it would not have been altogether surprising. For he was a man of quite remarkable eminence. He had been tipped by the Duke of Wellington. He had pulled down the coat collar of Lord Palmerston on more than one occasion; while as for Lord Granville, he had known him almost as well as he had known his own father.

“How is Ponto this morning?” inquired the occupant of the four-poster.

“In excellent spirits, my lady.”

“And his appetite?”

“He has partaken of a portion of chicken, my lady, with excellent relish.”

“Humph!” was the ungracious rejoinder. “That dog eats as much as a Christian.”

In the opinion of Marchbanks Ponto ate more, but he did not say so. He was content merely to bow and withdraw with simple dignity. Caroline read her letters and glanced at the Court Circular, the Parliamentary Report and the Money Market. She then announced her intention of getting up. Over this complex process it is well to draw a veil. Enough that an hour and a half later she reached her morning room, a veritable dragon in black silk leaning on an ebony walking stick.

The normal state of her temper was severe. “Acidulated to the verge of the morose,” said those who had particular cause to respect it. A considerable body they were. On this morning of early spring, this seventy-third commemoration of the most salient fact of her ex-

perience, her temper was so formidable that it smote the officers of her household with dismay.

Various causes had contributed to the state of the barometer. To begin with, that impertinent fellow Cheriton had written his usual persiflage upon the subject of her birthday. It fell upon the first of April, a stroke of irony, in Cheriton's opinion, for which she had never been quite able to forgive her Creator. Then again, if one came to think of it, what had existence to offer an old woman who had so long outlived her youth, who had neither kith nor kin of her own, who bored her friends, who made her dependents miserable; who was unable to take exercise, who distrusted doctors and despised the clergy, a praiser of past times who considered the present age all that it ought not to be?

Why should such a one as Caroline Crewkerne be in a good humor on her seventy-third birthday? She was a nuisance to everybody, including herself. She was a selfish and conceited old woman. Yet even she had her points.

Certainly she was good to her pug. For that repulsive and over-fed animal she had a regard which might almost be said to amount to affection. But mark the ingratitude of the canine race. How did that misshapen, soulless, pampered beast whose figurehead was like a gargoyle and whose eyes were so swollen with baked meats that they could scarcely revolve, requite the constant care of his mistress? Why, by getting fat. There could be no doubt that Ponto was getting fat.

Almost the first thing Lady Crewkerne did upon what was to prove one of the most memorable days of a long and not particularly useful life was to issue an edict. It was to the effect that John, the second footman, must exercise Ponto for an hour every morning in the park. But it was not until about a quarter to two—at least it



was very near luncheon time—that the occurrence happened from which springs the germ of this history.

How it came about will never be known. It is a problem to baffle the most expert psychologists. For at about a quarter to two, just as Miss Burden had returned from the circulating library, this thing befell. Caroline Crewkerne was visited by an idea. To be sure it did not reveal itself immediately in that crude and startling guise. It had its processes to go through, like a cosmos or a tadpole, or any other natural phenomenon that burgeons into entity. The evolutions by which it attained to its fullness were in this wise.

“Where have you been, Miss Burden?” Lady Crewkerne fixed an arctic eye upon the blue-backed volume under the arm of the companion.

“I have been changing a novel at Mudie’s.”

“The usual rubbish, I suppose.” Caroline gave a grim turn to her countenance, which rendered that frontispiece an admirable composite of a hawk and a hanging judge.

“Lord Cheriton said it was the best novel he had read for years,” said Miss Burden with the gentle air of one who reveres authority.

“Humph! Whatever Cheriton is, he has taste at least. Give it to me.”

Miss Burden handed the blue-backed volume to Lady Crewkerne. The old woman opened it warily, lest she should come too abruptly upon a fine moral sentiment.

The next thing Miss Burden realized was that Lady Crewkerne was fast asleep.

When Marchbanks came a few minutes later to announce that luncheon was ready his mistress, with the blue-backed volume in her lap, was snoring lustily. An anxious consultation followed. Her ladyship had not missed her luncheon for seventy-three years.

The far-seeing wisdom of Miss Burden—in a measure due no doubt to her pure taste in English fiction—was allowed to prevail. The state of Lady Crewkerne's temper could hardly be worse than it had been that morning. If she slept undisturbed it might conceivably be better.

Miss Burden was justified of her wisdom. Caroline missed her luncheon for the first time in seventy-three years. Ideas come to us fasting, and there is no other explanation to offer why this idea of hers came to be born.

## CHAPTER II

### THE IDEA WHICH CAME TO HER

**I**T was a quarter to three when the old woman awoke. She was alone save for Ponto, her fidus Achates, who was snoring in front of the fire with his tail curved up in a most ridiculous manner. And yet she was not alone, for there is reason to believe that the idea was already in being. For it hardly admits of doubt that it had come alive, even before she had time to turn, which she did almost immediately, to the cutlet and the mild whiskey and soda, which her physician had ordered.

The idea was not proclaimed forthwith in its meridian splendor. At present it was still in embryo. It had to undergo gestation in the dim recesses of the mind before gathering momentum to issue like a second Minerva from the brow of Jove.

At four o'clock precisely it was Lady Crewkerne's custom, light and the British climate permitting, to drive the length of Bond Street and once round Hyde Park.

At that hour, the sky having cleared sufficiently for the sun to make a tardy and shamefaced appearance, Caroline, accompanied by her faithful gentlewoman and her somnolent, four-footed beast, entered the chariot that was drawn up before her door.

It was a remarkable vehicle. Furnished with yellow wheels and a curious round body, which according to scale was nearly as fat as Ponto's, it was perched up on very high springs, and was in the forefront of the fashion about the year 1841.

Mr. Bryant and Mr. Gregory, who shared the box-seat,

would doubtless have been in the forefront of the fashion about the same period. Their broad backs, their box-cloth, the shape and texture of their hats and the angle at which they wore them, unmistakably belonged to a very early period of the world's history. No, they did not wear side-whiskers. Perhaps it was that side-whiskers were either a little in front or a little behind the mode in 1841. But it is enough that Messrs. Bryant and Gregory did not wear them.

The progress along Bond Street was at the rate of four miles an hour. The horses, Castor and Pollux by name, were somnolent and very fat, the yellow chariot was very unwieldy, and in the language of Constable X, who touched his helmet at the corner of Hanover Square, "it took up a deal o' room." None the less, the progress of the vehicle was almost royal.

Caroline sat very upright in the center of the best seat, which she had all to herself. With a nose of the Wellington pattern and a chin to match, displayed under a canopy of feathers, she looked more like a macaw than ever. Miss Burden, in charge of Ponto and a *lorgnon* with a tortoise-shell handle, was seated opposite at a more modest elevation.

Members of the male sex whom this redoubtable veteran chanced to meet, having the good fortune to wear their clothes with a sufficient air of distinction, received an occasional bow from her; and in return she was the recipient of some highly elaborate courtesies. With these she ranked as "an amusing old woman."

By members of the other sex, who, seated in their barches, their victorias, their broughams and their motors, regarded her from under their own canopies of feathers, she was greeted with a slight inclination of the head and a stiffening of eyelid, half fear, half-veiled hostility, and a whispered, "There she goes, that dangerous old thing."

No doubt the old woman proceeding along Bond Street in her yellow chariot had done a fair amount of mischief in her time; and if health and strength continued to be vouchsafed her by an All-wise Creator, before she died she hoped to do a good deal more. In her own little corner of her own little world no one was more respected. Where she was not respected she was feared, and where she was neither respected nor feared she was very heartily disliked. Nobody's reputation was safe in her keeping. She never said a kind word of anybody; and although she may have done good by stealth, she did it very seldom in the light of day. Yet there can be little doubt that Ponto loved her in his dumb way and that Marchbanks respected her immensely.

Proceeding along Bond Street, her idea continued to evolve in the purlieus of a hard yet not capacious mind. Sitting very upright in the center of her chariot, bleakly indifferent to those who did not interest her and coldly overlooking those who did, this old woman had come almost alongside the shop on the left going towards Piccadilly where you can get the nicest top-hat in London, when she beheld an apparition.

It was a Hat. Of gray felt with a dent in the middle and rather wide in the brim, it was of the variety which is called a Homburg because it is worn at Cannes. Round this article of masculine attire, in itself sufficiently bizarre, was what is technically known as "a Guards' ribbon."

Now there was only one individual in London who at that time (*circa* 1900) was likely to be taking the air of Bond Street in a Homburg hat with a Guards' ribbon on April the first. Messrs. Bryant and Gregory knew that quite as well as their mistress. Therefore Castor and Pollux came to a halt, just as the Hat came to a halt also, immediately opposite the coat of arms on the panel of the yellow chariot.

In homage to the Hat of Hats Mr. Bryant and Mr. Gregory each touched his own headgear (*circa* 1841) with a deference which if a little exaggerated was no discredit to human nature.

“How d’ye do, George?”

Such a form of salutation may mean much or it may mean little. As far as Caroline Crewkerne was concerned it implied the former. She only said, “How d’ye do?” to the highest branch of the peerage.

“How d’ye do, George?” said the occupant of the yellow chariot.

“Pooty well for an old ’un,” said the owner of the Hat in a gruff, fat voice.

“How old *are* you?”

“Nearly as old as you,” said the Hatted one. Then said he with slow and gruff solemnity: “Many happy returns of your birthday, Caroline. A great pleasure to see you looking so well.”

“Thank you, George,” said the old woman with formidable politeness. “Regular habits and a good conscience are worth something when you get past seventy.”

George Betterton, Duke of Brancaster, began to gobble like a turkey. He was a heavy-jowled, purple-faced, apoplectic-looking individual, rather redundant of form and decidedly short in the neck. So famous was he for his powers of emulation of the pride of the farmyard, that he went by the name of “Gobo” among his intimates. As his habits were not so regular and his conscience was not so chaste as it might have been, George Betterton grew redder in the jowl than ever, and rolled his full-blooded eyes at the occupant of the yellow chariot.

“Nothing been crossing you, Caroline, I hope?”

“Yes and no, George,” said the occupant of the chariot with that bluntness of speech in which none excelled her. “Ponto is getting fat and Miss Burden is tiresome, and

Cheriton has been insolent and I am tired of life; but I intend to hold on some time yet just to spite people. The world is all the better for having an old nuisance or two in it."

This philanthropic resolution did not seem to arouse as much enthusiasm in George Betterton as perhaps it ought to have done. All the same, he was very polite in his gruff, stolid, John Bull fashion.

"Glad to hear it, Caroline. We should never get on, you know, without you old standards."

"Rubbish!" said the old woman robustly. "You'd be only too glad of the chance. But that won't be at present, so make your mind easy."

Suddenly from under her fierce brows Caroline challenged him with the eye of a kite. "What are you doing in London, George? *She* is at Biarritz they tell me."

George Betterton pondered a moment in order to measure this old serpent with a full-blooded eye.

"I've come up to judge the dog show," said he.

"Oh, is there a dog show?" said Caroline upon a note of interest she seldom achieved. "When?"

"A week a' Toosday."

"If I send Ponto will you guarantee him a prize?"

"First prize."

"Look at him well so that you will know him again. Miss Burden, let the Dook look at Ponto."

"I've seen him so often," said George Betterton plaintively as that overfed quadruped leered at him biliously. "He's a ducky little dog."

"Don't forget that American creature whom Towcaster married has the effrontery to have one like him. If you confuse him with hers I shall not forgive you."

"Better tie a piece of blue ribbon round his tail."

His Grace of Brancaster turned upon his heel.

“Remember my Wednesday,” the old woman called after him in stentorian tones.

Whether George Betterton heard her or whether he did not is difficult to say. It is rather a failing of high personages that they are apt to be afflicted with a sudden and unaccountable deafness. Caroline’s voice could be heard the other side of Bond Street, but her old friend gave no sign that it had penetrated to his ears.

The yellow chariot moved on. Its occupant, looking exceedingly grim and rather like a Gorgon born out of due time, immediately proceeded to cut dead the inoffensive widow of a Baron of the Exchequer who with her two pretty daughters was driving to the Grosvenor Galleries.

If there were those who could be deaf to her, there were also those to whom she could be blind. There can be no question that during the course of her long life she had had things far more her own way than is good for any human creature. But some there were who were beginning openly to rebel from her despotic sway. George Betterton was not the only person of late who had been afflicted with deafness.

All the same, if the look of this old woman meant anything she had to be reckoned with. It had often been remarked by those of her friends who followed “the fancy” that her face in certain aspects bore a striking resemblance to that of an eminent pugilist. A demeanor of perfectly ruthless sarcasm and a mouth very hard and arbitrary returned to Hill Street at a quarter to five. The rebels must be brought to heel.

The redoubtable Caroline had been home about an hour, when without further preliminary her idea suddenly entered the region of material fact. She was in the middle of a game of piquet, a daily exercise, Sundays excepted, in which she showed the greatest proficiency,



and ending as a rule in the almost total annihilation of her adversary. Having "rubiconed" her gentlewoman and having mulcted her in the sum of two shillings, which Miss Burden could ill afford to lose, the idea burst from its shell and walked abroad.

Said Caroline—

"Do you remember the name of the person that was married by my sister Polly?"

Miss Burden was so much startled by the question that she could not answer immediately. Disconcerting as its abruptness was, its nature was even more so. For it dealt with one outside the pale.

"Per—Perring—Perkins," floundered Miss Burden. Never, upon any pretext whatever, was that name mentioned in Hill Street, Mayfair.

"Look it up in *Walford*."

Miss Burden consulted that invaluable work of reference. With some difficulty and many misgivings she was able to disinter the following:—

"Perry, Aloysius, Clerk in Holy Orders, Master of Arts. Eldest surviving son of Reverend John Tillotson Perry and Maria, 2nd daughter of Montague Hawley, Esquire. Born 1842. Married the Lady Mary Augusta, younger daughter of Charles William Wargrave, 3rd Duke of Dorset, and Caroline, daughter of 5th Marquis of Twickenham. Incumbent of Saint Euthanasius, Slocum Magna, and Perpetual Curate of Widdiford Parish Church. Heir S., Richard Aloysius Wargrave Perry, Clerk in Holy Orders, Bachelor of Arts. Address: The Vicarage, Slocum Magna, North Devon."

When Caroline had duly learned these facts she knitted her brows, pondered deeply, and said, "Humph!" A look of grim resolution settled upon her countenance.

"I am going to try an experiment. I shall write to that man."

In those simple words was embodied the old woman's idea in the fullness of its splendor. For the first time in her life she deigned to recognize the existence of the Reverend Aloysius Perry.

Duly dictated to the gentlewoman, the recognition assumed the following shape:—

“The Countess of Crewkerne presents her compliments to Mr. Perry. Lady Crewkerne will be pleased to adopt a girl of her late sister's. Should this course be agreeable to Mr. Perry, Lady Crewkerne would suggest that the best looking and most mannerly of her late sister's children be forwarded to her.”

“Get my spectacles,” said the old woman. “Let me see what you have written.”

A secret tear veiled the kind eyes of Miss Burden when she rose to obey this behest. A long-drawn sigh escaped her, the beating of her heart was quickened. The coming of a third person would do something at any rate to relieve the intolerable tedium of that establishment.

Caroline read her letter with patience and with cynicism.

“It will serve,” said she. “Send it immediately.”

And then a strange thing happened. The most natural and becoming course for Miss Burden to take was to ring the bell, in order that this curious document might be dispatched by a servant. But she did not do this. In her own person Miss Burden quitted the room. Without waiting to put on a hat, she passed out at the hall door and with her own hand dropped the letter in the pillar box at the corner of Berkeley Square.

## CHAPTER III

### LORD CHERITON LOOKS IN

**T**HREE days later there was delivered in Hill Street a letter bearing a West-country postmark. It was written in narrow, upright characters which seemed to have a shade of defiance in them. The envelope was inscribed with some formality to the Right Honorable the Countess of Crewkerne, yet its shape was unfashionable, the paper was of inferior quality and was innocent of any sort of adornment.

When this document was delivered by Mr. Marchbanks to his august mistress in the sanctity of her four-poster, a slight flicker played about the eyelids of that elderly diplomatist. It was as if, with the *flair* that always distinguished him, he had come to divine that a great event was in the air.

The bearing of his mistress added weight to this theory. No sooner did she observe this commonplace missive to be nestling among the more ornate communications that owed their being, as Mr. Marchbanks knew so well, to dukes and marquises and earls and the ladies of dukes and marquises and earls, than she swooped down upon it with outstretched talon for all the world as some old eagle might have done. She read as follows:—

“The Revd. Aloysius Perry has the honor to present his compliments to the Countess of Crewkerne, and begs to say in response to her request that he is forwarding to-morrow (Tuesday) by passenger train his second

daughter Araminta, who in his humble judgment is the most attractive of those with which it has pleased Providence to endow him."

The old woman, propped up in bed, honored this communication with two readings and an ominous brow. She was a very sharp-witted old woman, and she could not quite make up her mind whether the unconventional flavor that clung to the letter of the man who had been married by her sister Polly was the fruit of conscious irony or of *bona-fide* rusticity.

"Humph!"—her invariable exclamation when in doubt upon any subject. "An underbred person, I am afraid."

With a contemptuous gesture she flung the cause of her uncertainty across the counterpane to Miss Burden.

"It is an experiment. A woman of my age has no right to add to her responsibilities. However, we shall see."

"I feel sure she will be a sweet girl," ventured Miss Burden.

"Pray, why do you think so?"

"Girlhood is so delightful. All young things are so adorable."

"You are a fool!"

The rejoinder was perfectly ruthless.

Miss Burden blushed faintly, as she always did when her birthright was applied to her in scorn. Yet it was a trial she had daily to endure. She had been called a fool so often that she had come to believe that she was one. And that is a faith that renders the human lot very hard.

"A dangerous experiment," the old woman proceeded. "At my age one ought to know better than to try experiments. I hope the creature will be presentable."

“Surely, dear Lady Crewkerne, a girl of poor dear Lady Augusta’s can hardly fail to be that.”

“The father is quite common, a person of no particular family. And girls, unfortunately, take after their fathers.”

“One feels sure that the husband of dear Lady Augusta is a gentleman.”

“You are a born fool! Ring the bell. It is time I had my massage.”

In the course of the morning Caroline Crewkerne’s oldest friend looked in to pass the time of day with her. He stayed to luncheon.

Lord Cheriton was one of those men whose mission in life it is to appear on all occasions as one apart from the vulgar herd. There can be little doubt that he succeeded in this ambition. His style of dress was not to everybody’s taste, and there were also those who did not care greatly for the note of exaggeration in his manner. But Caroline Crewkerne’s judgment of her old gossip was the correct one. Whatever Cheriton was or whatever he was not, emphatically he was not a fool. Had he been in anywise oppressed by that not unamiable form of human weakness the redoubtable Caroline would have been quick to expose it. In a matter of that kind her instinct was infallible. They knew each other so well, they had crossed swords so often, each derived such a zest from the display of the other’s dexterity, that while interpreting one another with a frankness that less robust persons might have found almost brutal, it had mutual respect for a basis.

Cheriton was an admirer of women. If they were pretty his admiration was apt to increase. Indeed, if a character of quite singular merit had its weak point it was to be found in his attitude towards the more attractive members of the sex.

To woman in the abstract, however, it was his wont to be extraordinarily charming and attentive. No one could call Miss Burden supremely attractive. She had so many things against her, including the immediate loss of her place had she developed any special powers of that kind. But she had long been Lord Cheriton's devoted slave and sconce bearer. It was merely the result of his way with the ladies. Young or old, fair or ugly, it made no difference. A deferential air of candid homage, touched ever so lightly with sarcasm, was at the service of all who bore the name of woman, whether it was Caroline Crewkerne herself, her penniless dependent, or the old flower seller at the top of the Haymarket. His grace of manner, with its slightly ironical bonhomie, was dedicated to one and all.

Miss Burden adored Lord Cheriton. It was, of course, a secret passion; but there can be no doubt that had the occasion arisen she would gladly have yielded her life for this handsome, polite, finely preserved Lothario of five-and-sixty. It is not a matter for wonder. Although she was a well-read woman with a sure taste of her own, he made out her circulating library list; he invariably had a bunch of violets to offer her, or any other simple flower that was in season; he took a genuine interest in the condition of her health; and there was every reason to believe that in his inmost heart he shared her intense dislike of Ponto, who had very rudimentary ideas indeed of the deference due to black and white check trousers.

"Cheriton," said the hostess, as soon as they were seated at luncheon, "are you aware that George Betterton is in London?"

The pair of old gossips looked one another in the face with an air of preternatural innocence.

"And she at Biarritz," said Cheriton in a musical voice.

The old woman bent across the table with a sibylline gesture.

“Mark my words,” said she, “the régime is at an end.”

“I never prophesy in these cases,” said Cheriton. “She is a very able woman, which of course is not surprising, and George is the incarnation of sheer stupidity, which is not surprising either. All the same, Caroline, I don’t say you are not right.”

“Of course I am right,” said Caroline robustly. “And I put it to you, Cheriton, what will be the next move upon the tapis?”

“George will marry,” said Cheriton tentatively.

His old friend nodded her head in sage approval.

“Have you selected a duchess for him?”

“Why do you ask?” The air of diplomacy amused Cheriton because it was so unnecessary.

“I ask merely for information. If I were a sporting tipster, Priscilla L’Estrange would be my selection.”

“No,” said Caroline Crewkerne with immense decision, “a man never marries a woman as stupid as himself. Nature’s an old fool, but she knows better than that.”

Cheriton pondered this philosophical statement with a sagacious smile. Caroline’s air, however, was so pontifical that it was not for his sex to dissent from it.

“Well, there is a great deal of stupidity in the world,” said he, “and it seems to be increasing. By the way, was George sober?”

“He was holding himself very erectly and was walking very slowly.”

“Then I’m afraid he wasn’t. But it must be the most tedious thing out to spend one’s life in losing one’s money at cards and in criticising the Militia.”

“Yes,” Caroline agreed. “I share your opinion that it is time George began to pay attention to more permanent things.”

"The Militia is always with us."

"I meant spiritual things, Cheriton," said Caroline Crewkerne, whose day-of-judgment demeanor nearly choked his lordship.

"George Betterton," said he, "has the spirituality of a wheelbarrow. It will give me great pleasure to be present when the subject is mentioned."

"He is coming to my Wednesday. I may speak to him then. That reminds me that Mary Ann Farquhar says this new Lancashire bishop eats his cheese in the old-fashioned manner, and he is now in London. If I knew his address I would send him a card."

"The Carlton Hotel, I believe, is the headquarters of the Church of London."

"Miss Burden," said the old woman austerely, "please make a note of that."

With an ostentation that Caroline Crewkerne considered wholly unnecessary Cheriton inscribed this contribution to sociology on the tablets of her companion. "What new game is the old heathen going to play, I wonder?" was the question that passed through his mind as he did so.

"Why is Gobo in the parish?" inquired my lord. "Worrying the War Office as usual?"

"No," said Caroline; "he seemed more serious than usual, but that may have been drink. As I am showing Ponto at the dog show on Tuesday week, George has consented to award the prizes. I have suggested a silver collar. I don't know anything more becoming than a silver collar for a dog of Ponto's type."

"I'm afraid it's a job; and don't forget, Caroline, the last one you perpetrated did no good to the country."

"Pray, what do you mean, Cheriton?" said the old woman, with her bristles going up like a badger. "Have the goodness to explain your meaning."

"That boy from Eton—your *protégé*—whom you sent



out to South Africa to command a brigade, made a dooce of a hash of it, they tell me.”

“That is a lie, Cheriton, and you know it.” The old woman’s voice quivered so much with passion that it frightened Miss Burden considerably. “The dear Dook once told me himself that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton.”

“Caroline, it is the taking for gospel the senile speeches of an old foggy who lived far longer than any man ought to do that has so nearly lost us a continent. The playing-fields of Eton, forsooth!”

“Cheriton,” said his hostess, “I despise you.”

The light of battle was in her eye. But it is hardly correct to speak of their crossing swords. The weapons they used were cudgels, in the use of which they were singularly adept.

Miss Burden was more than a little alarmed. But she had witnessed so many exhibitions of a similar kind between these combatants, who fully enjoyed a rough and tumble whenever they met, that it is by no means certain that the fears of this true-blue Victorian lady were not in the nature of a pleasant emotion.

It was not until they were drinking coffee in the seclusion of the boudoir that peace was restored. Both parties to the conflict had appeared to advantage, for their practice in all kinds of verbal warfare was considerable. Cheriton’s phrases, by long association with the great world, were as direct as possible. He called a spade a spade, but his manner of doing so was extremely charming. Miss Burden thought his most incisive speeches were full of melody. As for Caroline Crewkerne, she was the sharpest tongued old woman in London. And the least scrupulous, said the very considerable body who had been flayed by it.

Peace restored, Caroline made a suggestion.

“Cheriton,” said she, “in my humble opinion it is high time you settled down. Why don’t you marry?”

“*Cherchez la femme.*”

“If you will place the matter in my hands I shall be happy to do what I can for you.”

“I am overwhelmed.”

“Don’t be a coxcomb, Cheriton,” said Caroline sharply. “Let us look at the matter in a practical light. I repeat, in my humble opinion you ought to marry.”

“*Pourquoi?*”

“In the first place,” said the old woman ruthlessly, “it is no use disguising the fact that young and attractive women are inclined to smile at you. Don’t forget that you are sixty-five in December.”

Cheriton writhed a little. The laugh he managed to raise sounded pitifully hollow. In the circumstances he would have done better to lower his flag. The poor butterfly, when the pin is through its middle, only adds to its tortures by twisting its body and flapping its wings. Caroline Crewkerne smiled grimly.

“The fact is, my friend,” said she, “you have grown already a little *passé* for the rôle of Phœbus Apollo. The phrase is not mine. It was whispered in my ear by an insolent girl who looks upon you in the light of a grandfather.”

With a yellow silk handkerchief Cheriton delicately removed a bead of perspiration from his brow.

“I have heard complaints of your mustache,” Caroline went on. “In my humble opinion it requires careful treatment. It hardly seems to harmonize at present with your general scheme of color. When did you dye it last?”

“The day on which you last dyed your hair. As they belong to the same period, I thought it right to—”

“My hair is dyed weekly,” said Caroline. “But what

I want to point out to you is this. In my opinion it is high time you were married. You are rich. It is almost a national scandal that there is no entertaining at Cheriton House; and the title reverts to a branch of the family you don't esteem. Surely there is to be found in the world some youngish person of modest attractions—do not delude yourself, Cheriton, that you can ask more—to whom you may offer a vocation."

"There is a little actress at the Gaiety," said Cheriton thoughtfully. "She seems a healthy creature. I dare say she—"

"Miss Burden, please quit the room," said Caroline sourly.

Blushing like a peony and trembling like an aspen—a double feat of which gentlewomen nurtured in the true Victorian tradition were always capable—Miss Burden obeyed.

Cheriton closed the door.

"Yes, I dare say she would," said Caroline with her hanging-judge demeanor. "All the same, Cheriton, you talk like a fool."

What Caroline Crewkerne said to Cheriton and what Cheriton said to Caroline Crewkerne is not to be disclosed. She was a survival of a famous oligarchy which never minced its language. She had always been accustomed, as had her Georgian forbears, before her, to call a spade a spade. It was a mark of caste. And Cheriton, too, beneath his superficial airs and dandified graces, which had won for him the title of "the last of the macaronis," had a strain of quite uncompromising frankness.

Neither of these old and hardened worldlings was at all inclined to view the great institution called Woman in any sense romantically. Cheriton would have certainly rebutted the charge with scorn, but none the less his sense of delicacy was only skin deep. A third person over-

hearing their conversation without being furnished with a key must have concluded that it had to do with the bringing into the world of a pedigree horse, a prize cow, or a speckled rhinoceros. And he must have wondered why two persons who had obviously moved in good society from their youth up should sit *tête-à-tête* in a beautiful room in one of the most exclusive streets in all London discoursing with remarkable gusto upon a subject which would have befitted a couple of yokels in a farm-yard.

"There's my niece," said Caroline Crewkerne.

"Have you a niece?" said Cheriton.

"A girl of Polly's. You remember Polly?"

"Speaking *ex cathedra*," said Cheriton, "and with an ample sense of responsibility, I think Polly was the plainest woman I ever met."

"Odd," said Caroline, "that I had all the good looks as well as all the brains. It made life so difficult for Polly. Yet her heart may have been better than mine."

"Yes, Caroline, I think so," Cheriton assented gracefully. "But I don't seem to remember Polly's marriage."

"It was not a marriage."

"No?" Cheriton's sudden access of interest seemed open to misinterpretation.

"Polly married the village curate who hadn't a shilling."

"Poor devil!"

"To which of the contracting parties do you refer?" asked the incisive Caroline.

"Must have been a poor devil if he hadn't a shilling."

"Of course," said Caroline, "the family never forgave her. Papa forbade her the neighborhood. He might have forgiven the village, and he might have forgiven the curacy, but he could not forgive the shilling."

"Naturally," said Cheriton. "But I've known parsons' daughters turn out very well before now. I've seen one

or two who looked capital in the Gaiety chorus. What's the age of the gal?"

"Nineteen."

"An alluring period. Has she a good disposition?"

"She is my niece," said Caroline with admirable succinctness.

"I shall come and see her. When is she on view?"

Caroline Crewkerne enfolded herself in her mantle of high diplomacy. She paused to measure Cheriton with her goshawk's eye.

"A month to-morrow."

"Capital," said Cheriton.

He rose at his leisure.

"Good-by, Caroline," said he. "It has been very pleasant to find you so much your old self."

Caroline gave him a withered talon.

"Consult a specialist about your mustache."

"What, for a parson's daughter!"

"A duke's granddaughter," said the imperious Caroline.

"I'm damned if I do!" said Cheriton amiably.

"You are damned if you don't," said Caroline, fixing upon him an eye that was positively arctic. "That is, if the creature is worth her salt."

"Doubtless you are right, Caroline," said Cheriton with the air of a man who made a god of reason. "You have a good head. If only your heart—"

With a bow and a smile which had wrought great havoc in their time, although not without a certain pathos now, Cheriton withdrew. He pointed a course towards a famous shop at the corner of Burlington Gardens.

"It is quite true what they say," this man of distinguished appearance and open manners might have been heard to mutter to high heaven, as he gazed upwards to inquire of Jove whether he intended to ruin his hat. "She is the most disagreeable old woman in London."

However, there is always the reverse of the medal, the other side to the picture. This handsome, courtly, carefully-preserved specimen had been mauled rather badly no doubt by the old lioness. But had he had eyes in the back of his head, or been gifted with some occult faculty, he would have found a salve for his wounds. For his exit from the house in Hill Street was marked by a mildly ascetic form discreetly veiled by the curtains of the dining-room windows. Could he have known of the eyes that were concentrated upon the back of his gracefully erect and faultlessly tailored exterior, could he by some subtle process of the mind have ravished the secrets of that chaste yet tender bosom, he would have been assured that it is not always necessary to invoke the black arts of the *perruquier* to recommend oneself to the mind and heart of a Christian gentlewoman. Had Lord Cheriton cut off his mustache as a Lenten sacrifice, which was not at all likely, as there is reason to fear he did not respect the Church sufficiently to contemplate such a course of action, within the sanctity of Miss Burden's heart would still have reigned the image of one perfect man, of one true prince.

## CHAPTER IV.

### ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST CAUSE OF ALL ROMANCE

**W**RAPPED in her reflections, Miss Burden was oblivious of the fact that an old woman leaning upon an ebony stick, and accompanied by the roundest of all possible dogs, with the curliest of all possible tails, had entered the room. With a somewhat cruel abruptness she was made aware of that fact.

“Don’t be a fool!” said a voice that was full of hard sarcasm. “Come away from that window immediately.” In dire confusion Miss Burden endeavored to disentangle herself from the folds of the window curtains.

“That man is as hollow as a drum,” said the old woman with a comprehensive wave of her walking stick, “and as vain as a peacock. Where is your self-respect, Miss Burden? A person of your age, position and appearance—it is indecent.”

Miss Burden was prepared to swoon. A few years earlier in the world’s history she might have done so. But even the emotional apparatus of a Christian gentlewoman is susceptible to streams of tendency. Even in the year 1900, although within the Victorian epoch, swoons were seldom indulged in by people of the highest sensibility. Therefore Miss Burden was content to blush guiltily, to droop her head, and to hoist in her mild gray eyes a hunted look that was really charming.

“Where is your list for the circulating library?” said the old woman sternly. “I must supervise your reading.

It is exercising a pernicious influence upon your mind and character."

Miss Burden produced the list from the recesses of a small wallet which was suspended from her waist.

"Precisely as I thought," said the old woman with a snort. "Novels, novels, novels! And by male writers. For some time past, Miss Burden, it has been clear to me that an evil influence has been at work. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, by George Meredith. Cross it out. Substitute Mrs. Turner's *Cautionary Stories*. *The Dolly Dialogues*, by Anthony Hope. Cross it out. Substitute *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*. *An Old Maid's Love Story*, by Anon. Cross it out. Substitute *The Pleasures of Life*, by Lord Avebury. *L'Abbè Constantin*, by—! Cross it out. Miss Burden, I forbid you to read French authors until the end of May."

Having issued this Draconian edict, the tyrant left her gentlewoman impaled haplessly upon the two-spiked thorn of shame and confusion. She proceeded to indulge in her daily siesta, which advancing years made more than ever necessary if her store of natural energy was to remain equal to the demands upon it.

At four o'clock, as you already know, it was Lady Crewkerne's custom, if the weather was favorable, to take the air in her yellow chariot. Upon this momentous day, however, the elements were adverse; and at twenty-seven minutes past four, by the clock in the blue drawing-room, she was to be found in that spacious, somber, yet magnificent apartment. She was wearing her second best turban, a black silk dress and a collar of old lace, secured by a brooch which was said to have been given to an ancestress by good Queen Elizabeth, who for reasons of State afterwards cut off the head of the recipient. Enthroned before a silver teapot and twelve Crown Derby teacups, with a monogram upon the bottom, prepared to



offer some very weak tea and some stale bread and butter to a number of persons who were not in the least likely to appear to claim it, she presented as formidable a figure as any to be found in London.

Let stress be laid upon the time—twenty-seven minutes past four—since that is the hour at which this story really begins. Then it was that a four-wheeled vehicle of a rapidly disappearing type drew up before the imposing front door of the house in Hill Street. Upon the roof of the “growler” was a dilapidated wooden box, insecurely tied with a cord which had been pieced in three places. And seated modestly enough in its interior was—well, the First Cause of All Romance.

There she was. The first thing to be seen in the dim recesses of the “growler” was her straw hat. Now there is a great deal in a hat. They are full of character—straw hats particularly. But this was a preposterous hat altogether. In the first place its dimensions were certainly remarkable; it flopped absurdly; there was a sag of the brim which was irresistibly impossible; while as for the contour and general condition of the hat, the less said upon that subject the better.

In shape, texture, and design this primitive article was more like an inverted vegetable basket than anything else. Unmistakably rustic, even in its prime, it was now old, discolored and misshapen, and the piece of black ribbon that had adorned it in its youth was really not fit for the West End of London. Purchased of the general outfitter of Slocum Magna for the sum of one-and-elevenpence-halfpenny in the spring of 1899, it was as rudimentary a form of headgear as was ever devised by the very remote district to which it owed its being. It had absolutely no business at all in that chaste thoroughfare which for many years past has been dedicated to the usage of fashion.

A lot of time is being taken over the hat. The inverted

vegetable basket was the first thing to emerge from the dim recesses of the "growler." And then came the tip of a chin. It was inclined at a furtive angle of feminine curiosity. Although only the extreme tip of it was visible, the preposterous headgear which overshadowed it really ought not to be mentioned on the same page. For there can be no question that the chin was the work of a very great Artist indeed.

The cabman came down very slowly from his perch. He was a veteran with an extremely red face and a look of knowledge which he had a perfect right to assume.

"'Ere you are, miss," said he, as he opened the door of the "growler" with an air which almost suggested that he was the ground landlord of the entire West End of London. "You'd like the portmanter down, what?"

"Oh yes, please, thank you so much," drawled from within a voice that was quite extraordinarily friendly.

While the cabman with great ceremony and an immense display of exertion was lifting the corded box from the roof the owner of the inverted vegetable basket emerged from the "growler," marched up the steps of the Right Honorable the Countess of Crewkerne's town residence, and rang a loud peal upon the front doorbell.

The front door was opened immediately by no less a person than John, who was rather inclined to expect a duchess. John devoted the more serious part of his life to the expectation of duchesses. And with his imper-turbable mien, his rather supercilious eyes, and his superb livery, no man on this planet, whatever point they have reached in Mars, was better fitted to receive one.

John was taken aback. By an inexcusable oversight Lady Crewkerne's household had not been informed that her ladyship's niece was expected. No carriage had been sent to meet her. The fact was that the old lady expected her on the following day. Whether the Reverend Aloy-

sius Perry had expressed himself obscurely, or whether Lady Crewkerne and her gentlewoman had read the letter carelessly, is a problem not easy to solve. But there the matter stood. The visitor from Slocum Magna in the middle of Exmoor, North Devon, was not in the least expected, and John was taken aback.

It did not take him long to recover, for his natural self-possession was considerable, and he was a man of the world. Almost immediately he began to subject the invader to a very severe scrutiny. He began with the crown of her hat. To say the least, the beginning was unfortunate. From the hat his hostile gaze passed to a very rustic-looking cloak which had a hood to it. If there was one thing that John despised more than another it was a cloak with a hood.

Then the frock underneath! It was a sort of lilac print affair, faded in places and completely outgrown by its wearer, who—whisper it not in Bond Street!—stood exactly six feet in her stockings. The skirt of this nondescript garment displayed a great deal more ankle than is considered correct in the metropolis. And the boots which adorned those ankles gave them a prominence that Nature had not intended them to bear. The village cobbler at Slocum Magna has always had the reputation of a conscientious and painstaking craftsman, but it is doubtful whether he will ever be awarded a diploma for his skill in the higher grades of his calling. The ankles of the fair visitor were encased in the stoutest, most misshapen pair of laced-up boots John had ever seen in his life.

Moreover, John's eye lit on a pair of gloves which in his opinion were all that a pair of gloves should not be. They were made of black cotton and were very freely darned; and, as if this were not enough, the glove of the dexter hand was clasped round a wicker basket of a

decidedly rural, not to say common, character. The lid, which was secured by a piece of string, had an air of uncertainty about it. At any moment it threatened to yield to the weight it had to bear. And as if all these unlucky details did not in themselves suffice, there was a "growler" immediately opposite the sacred precincts; while even at that moment a red-faced and festive-looking cabman was toiling up the steps with a dilapidated wooden box, tied by a cord which had been pieced in three places.

In the circumstances there was only one thing for John to do. This John did with energy and conviction. He sniffed.

At almost the same moment a perfectly ludicrous drawl assailed his ears.

"Does Aunt Caroline live here, please?"

It is not too much to say that John was nonplused by the question.

"This is the residence of the Countess of Crewkerne," he said with hauteur.

Unhappily, the effect of this announcement was marred by the officious behavior of the cabman. That worthy at least felt no embarrassment. With a wheeze and a grunt which were wholly unnecessary, because the box contained so little, he made his way past its owner with ostentatious heaviness, and was about to bring it into forcible contact with John's best livery, when the custodian of the portals realized that it was a time for action.

"Don't bring it in," he said sternly. "Stay where you are. I will make inquiries."

With a glance, not to the cabman only, but to the wearer of the inverted vegetable basket also, which intimated that they crossed that threshold upon peril of their lives, John turned upon his heel. He walked across the entrance hall to confer with his chief, who was no less a personage than Mr. Marchbanks himself.

The conference was grave, but it was brief. Mr. Marchbanks came forward in his own inimitable manner, only to find that the fair intruder, preposterous hat, hooded cloak, cobbled boots, darned gloves and all, had had the temerity to enter the house.

It is not too much to say that Marchbanks frowned upon her. Certainly he looked very majestic indeed, and throughout the length and breadth of Mayfair it would have been hard to find a man more imposing than he. His nose was like the Duke of Wellington's, and his demeanor was modeled upon that of that renowned hero and patriot. In his cut-away morning coat and spotless shirt front and large Gladstone collar—purchased at the shop which had had the honor of supplying that distinguished statesman—with his black tie and his patrician features, he might just as well have been Prime Minister of England as merely the butler to old Lady Crewkerne.

Stress is laid upon these facts, because the behavior of the Heroine is almost without parallel. She attempted to shake hands with the butler.

In a measure John was to blame. He approached Marchbanks so reverently, he addressed him with such an air of deference, that the artless intruder might almost be pardoned for jumping to the conclusion that here was a marquis uncle whom she had never heard of before. At any rate, no sooner had the finely-chiseled profile confronted the creature of the straw hat than she tucked the wicker basket firmly under her left arm, thrust out her right hand, and beamed upon him.

Marchbanks showed great coolness and presence of mind. He drew himself up to his full height. It was a great crisis in his life, yet there was a noble absence of confusion. After an instant of silence, in which he successfully sought to recover the grand manner, he held a brief private colloquy with his subaltern. Neither of

these gentlemen had been told that her ladyship expected her niece, but Mrs. Plunket, the housekeeper, had informed them that a new housemaid was expected at six o'clock.

That is how the instinct of Marchbanks came to betray him.

## CHAPTER V

### THE INSTINCT OF MR. MARCHBANKS BETRAYS HIM

**I**N the stateliest fashion Mr. Marchbanks made his way to the housekeeper's room.

Mrs. Plunket, indisputable sovereign of the nether regions, was taking tea. Mr. Marchbanks greeted her with an air of private wrong.

"A young person, ma'am, is arrived," said he.

Said Mrs. Plunket—

"The new under-housemaid is not due until six o'clock. She has no right to come before her time."

"I am almost afraid," said Mr. Marchbanks with diplomatic reserve, "that this is her first place."

"Surely not," said Mrs. Plunket. "According to her references she has been ten months in the service of the Duchess Dowager of Blackhampton."

"Then I fear," said Mr. Marchbanks gravely, "that she has not profited by her experience."

The housekeeper expressed a becoming surprise.

"She rang the front doorbell."

"That is unpardonable. Yet the Duchess Dowager of Blackhampton is generally considered very good service."

"Things are very unsettled nowadays," said Mr. Marchbanks gloomily. "It almost seems that even good service is a thing of the past. If we must have Radical governments, and higher education of the masses, there's no saying what will happen to the country. She—ah, she attempted to shake hands with me!"

Mrs. Plunket shuddered.

“Mr. Marchbanks,” said she, “I am afraid she will have to be sent away.”

At heart, however, Mr. Marchbanks was a man of liberal views, as became one who had been nurtured in Whig traditions.

“She is young,” he said with a dignified mildness which in the circumstances Mrs. Plunket admired extremely. “A word in season from the right quarter might bear fruit.”

“She shall have it,” said the housekeeper with a truculent shake of the teapot.

“Her style of dress also leaves much to be desired. It is distinctly *suburban* to my mind. But no doubt, Mrs. Plunket, you will prefer to judge for yourself.”

“I will see her. But I feel sure that she will have to be sent away. Yet to be an under-housemaid short does make life so difficult.”

“Perhaps she may be molded,” said Mr. Marchbanks with the optimism of the true Whig.

The butler withdrew. At a majestic leisure he climbed the dark stairs to the hall. He was greeted immediately by a gesture of distress from John. It seemed that those sacred precincts were being defiled by an altercation between a creature in a primitive straw hat and a rustical frock and an elderly cabman who smelt strongly of gin.

The fare had set down her wicker basket on the hall parquet, and with some little difficulty had contrived to draw half a crown from the inside of her glove.

The cabman had received this coin dubiously. After gazing at it thoughtfully as it lay in his grimy palm, said he—

“What about the box, miss? And a wet arternoon.”

“Dearest papa said the fare would be half a crown from



Paddington Station," said the inhabitant of the preposterous hat.

"I know nothing about your pa, miss," said the cabman firmly, "but what I do know is that there box is outside luggage. And I got it down meself, and I carried it in with my own 'ands, and it's raining like old boots."

"Dearest papa said—" the Straw-hatted One was proceeding to explain very slowly and with great patience, when in response to John's silent appeal Mr. Marchbanks intervened with quiet authority.

Very deftly Mr. Marchbanks added sixpence to the cabman's half-crown. "Go away as soon as possible," he said sternly. "We are likely to have callers at any moment."

In recognition of the fact that he had to do with a gentleman the cabman touched his hat and proceeded to do as he was told.

"Do you mind coming this way, miss—ah," said the butler a little haughtily to the lady of the hat.

"Miss Perry." The drawl was really ludicrous.

In extenuation of Marchbanks' conduct in this amazing affair it has to be said that neither his sense of sight nor of hearing were quite so good as they had been. Otherwise that ludicrous drawl must have caused him considerable uneasiness.

Miss Perry tucked the wicker basket under her arm and followed the butler with perfect friendliness and simplicity. He opened the door of the housekeeper's room, and in his own inimitable manner announced—

"Miss Perry."

A decidedly severe, angular-looking dame disengaged her chin from a teacup.

"The housekeeper, Mrs. Plunket," Mr. Marchbanks deigned to explain to the owner of the straw hat.

Marchbanks mentioned the name of Mrs. Plunket, the

housekeeper, in a manner to suggest that reverence was expected from Miss Perry. Again, however, he was doomed to disappointment. The frigid inclination of Mrs. Plunket's head merely provoked a frank and friendly impulse in Miss Perry.

"Oh, how do you do?" said she. "I hope you are quite well."

To the dismay of Mr. Marchbanks and to the stupefaction of Mrs. Plunket, the new housemaid made a most determined effort to shake hands with that lady.

Mrs. Plunket gave her a finger. Being as shortsighted as Marchbanks himself, she hastily adjusted her spectacles to make a more adequate survey of this remarkable person.

Now, the first thing that impressed Mrs. Plunket was not the straw hat, not the gloves, not the frock, not the wicker basket, and not even the cloak with the hood. It was the truly Amazonian proportions of Miss Perry that first impressed her.

She was exactly six feet tall in her stockings, no more and no less. And everything about her, from the too visible ankles upwards, were according to scale. Had Mrs. Plunket had an eye for such details, and unfortunately she had not, she would have observed, in addition to the disconcerting physique and the shabby and ill-fitting clothes, a pair of the bluest eyes and a mane of the yellowest hair that ever came out of Devon. It is true that the eyes were somewhat dim and heavy, because they had shed a vast quantity of tears during the past forty-eight hours. All the same, their quality was wonderful. Then also there was an equally wonderful West-country complexion, washed by the dew, fed by the sunshine, and refined by the winds of the sea and the moorland into a perfect glamour of pink and white. Yet these enchanting details had nothing to say to Mrs. Plunket. For the first time in her life she had engaged a new housemaid merely

upon the strength of "high-class references," with a fatal neglect of the precaution of "a personal interview." In consequence the new housemaid proved to be six feet high, with a *naïveté* of dress and deportment wholly beyond Mrs. Plunket's experience.

"Pray sit down." Mrs. Plunket's arctic air would not have disgraced the presiding genius of the blue drawing-room.

Miss Perry sat down with spacious ease. She placed the wicker basket on her knees and rested her elbows upon it.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" said Mrs. Plunket stiffly.

"Thank you so much." Miss Perry seemed sincerely gratified by the suggestion.

Mr. Marchbanks retired discreetly, while Mrs. Plunket prepared a cup of tea for Miss Perry. As she handed it to her she gazed very sternly through her spectacles at the new housemaid, who sat nursing her wicker basket with perfect unconcern.

"Thank you so much." The cup of tea was accepted with really charming friendliness.

"I had no idea that you were so large," said Mrs. Plunket with an aggrieved air. "I think the fact ought to have been mentioned."

Miss Perry drew off her darned cotton gloves with great simplicity.

"I am rather big," said she; "but if the beds are too small I can curl myself up."

"I was not thinking of the beds," said Mrs. Plunket severely. "There are all sizes here. I was thinking of her ladyship. She is very strict and somewhat old-fashioned in her ideas. I am afraid she may object to your appearance."

"Do you think so?" said Miss Perry, putting three

lumps of sugar in her tea with the greatest amiability.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Plunket sternly, “I do. It is most unusual. Had you been an under-footman, of course it would not have mattered.”

“Don’t you think so?” said Miss Perry, who seemed to be more interested in her cup of tea than in the subject of the under-footman.

Now, Miss Perry had not a great brain. Indeed, in the opinion of those best qualified to speak upon the subject, she had not a brain at all. She was just a child of Nature, curiously slow-witted, outspoken yet phlegmatic. Such a reception in the household of her august relation, whom she had never seen, and of whom the only thing she knew positively was that, in conjunction with the rest of that great family, she had treated her papa and her dead mamma abominably, ought to have given her furiously to think. No one, however, could have been less addicted to that process than Miss Perry.

There certainly came into her mind a remarkable speech that had been made by her papa when he opened the coroneted envelope and read Aunt Caroline’s letter. “No doubt her ladyship has a vacancy for an under-housemaid!” he had said, with his whimsical laugh, which had yet been tried so severely by the things of this world as to be not quite so mirthful as it might have been.

By the time Miss Perry had remembered this incident a deep wave of color had crept over her wonderful countenance. But hers was the temperament of a philosopher. Instead of suffering an agony of horrified embarrassment, as some young ladies might have done, she merely regarded her tea and hoped to receive an invitation to partake of bread and butter.

“You have been in service before, have you not?” said Mrs. Plunket.

"Oh, no," drawled Miss Perry, finishing her cup of tea and looking as if she would like another.

"I am afraid this is serious." Mrs. Plunket's dignity was chilling. "I have been misinformed."

A pause ensued, in which Miss Perry hoped in vain for a little more refreshment.

"An awfully wet day, isn't it?" said Miss Perry conversationally.

Mrs. Plunket was too much occupied with the appearance of the latest thing in housemaids to pay the least attention to the weather.

"A mistake seems to have been made," said the housekeeper acidly. "I am informed that your name is Perry."

The information was confirmed with modest yet charming friendliness.

"What is your first name?" Mrs. Plunket inquired.

Miss Perry opened her blue eyes slowly to dimensions that were really extraordinary and gave a wise little shake to her mane, which was the color of daffodils.

"My name is Ar-ah-min-tah." The drawl was perfectly ludicrous. "But they call me Goose because I am rather a sil-lay."

Mrs. Plunket sat bolt upright. Her face was a picture of horror. The latest thing in housemaids was too much for her. "Emma Maddison is the name of the person I am expecting," she managed to say.

"R-r-really." The roll of Miss Perry's "r's" was inimitable.

"Emma Maddison has been under-housemaid ten months in service of the Duchess Dowager of Blackhampton."

"R-r-really!" But the azure orbs of Miss Perry were fixed upon the teapot.

Mrs. Plunket renewed her scrutiny of this remarkable housemaid. The battered straw hat or inverted vegetable

basket which sagged at the brim in an almost immoral manner, the hooded cloak, the wicker basket with string attachment, and the unprecedented display of ankle came again within her ken.

"This will never do." In a fashion very similar the Right Honorable Lord Jeffrey had once reviewed the poetry of Mr. William Wordsworth.

"Tell me," said the housekeeper austerely, "where have you come from?"

"My home is at Slocum Magna." Miss Perry dissembled her pride in that fact in an uncommonly well-bred manner.

"*Where*, pray, is Slocum Magna?"

"Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry, who was inclined to marvel at the ignorance of London people, "is the next parish to Widdiford."

"And *where*, pray, is Widdiford?"

Miss Perry's blue eyes opened to their limit. Widdiford was the center of civilization. It was the fixed standard by which the world itself was measured. Miss Perry slowly marshaled her battalions for a great intellectual display.

"I started from Widdiford at a quarter past nine and I got to London at four. That makes nearly seven hours by railway, and you have to change twice."

During the pause which followed this announcement Mrs. Plunket grew very thoughtful indeed. Finally a clear conviction seemed to enfold her.

"I am sorry, but I fear that an under-housemaid who is six feet high is out of question. Her ladyship has a rooted objection to any kind of extravagance."

Now Miss Perry was not in the least clever. Her knowledge of the world was wholly derived from that uncommonly rustic hamlet Slocum Magna. But she realized in her heavy-witted fashion that her Aunt Car-

oline was a very proud and unfeeling old woman who had an odious way of treating her poor relations. Therefore, coming vaguely to discern that the situation in which she found herself must be very remarkable, a look of dismay began to settle upon her pink and white countenance.

Mrs. Plunket, observing it, was not disposed to be unkind. "You had better stay here to-night. And to-morrow morning your fare will be paid back to Slocum Magna."

At the mention of the blessed name of Slocum Magna the look of dismay lifted from the face of Miss Perry. But it was for a moment only. She remembered with a pang that she had come all the way to London on a great mission. The ebbing fortunes of the Vicarage were vested in her. When her dearest papa, whose trousers seemed to get shorter and shabbier every year, had watched her button a whole sovereign and two half-crowns and a third-class railway ticket into her glove on the down platform at Widdiford Junction and he had kissed her on both cheeks, he said, "If it were not for Dickie and Charley, and Polly and Milly and Muffin, we'd take precious good care that your Aunt Caroline did not rob us of the pick of the basket." Therefore, very slowly yet very clearly, her duty seemed to shape itself in her mind.

"Oh, if you please," said she, "I don't *quite* think I want to go back to Slocum Magna. Perhaps I might speak to Aunt Caroline."

"Aunt Caroline?" said Mrs. Plunket with a puzzled air.

She then remembered that although Mrs. Bateman the cook was called Hannah, as cooks always are, her real name was Caroline.

"I was not aware," said Mrs. Plunket, "that you were a niece of Mrs. Bateman's."

Miss Perry was not aware of it either. A ray of light percolated to that unsusceptible mind. All was explained. She had come to the wrong house.

"Is this Mrs. Bateman's?" she asked.

"Certainly it is not Mrs. Bateman's," was the stern reply, "but she lives here, of course. Perhaps you would like to see her."

So much was Miss Perry mystified by this new turn of events that she was unable to say whether she would like to see Mrs. Bateman or not. In Mrs. Plunket's opinion silence gave consent. She rang the bell and desired the immediate attendance of that lady.

A portly, good-humored dame of florid complexion and communicative manners made her appearance.

"Mrs. Bateman," said Mrs. Plunket briefly, "I believe this is your niece."

Having overcome her first emotion of legitimate surprise, Mrs. Bateman welcomed Miss Perry with effusion.

"Why," she exclaimed, "it is that girl of Maria's! She is the image of Maria. Very pleased to see you, my love. How's your father?"

The next thing of which Miss Perry grew conscious was that fat arms were hugging her and that she was being kissed in a very vigorous manner.

"How like your mother, to be sure," said Mrs. Bateman, "and what a big girl you've grown!"

"Too big, in my opinion, for good service," said Mrs. Plunket.

"You can't have too much of a good thing, can you, my love?" said Mrs. Bateman.

Miss Perry was bewildered. Mrs. Bateman was not at all like the Aunt Caroline she had expected to see.

"Are you r-r-really Aunt Caroline?" she said, with her eyes at their widest.

"Why, you must be Sally," said Mrs. Bateman.



“Little Sally Dickinson who used to be so fond of sugar.”

“It seems to have been a stimulating diet,” said Mrs. Plunket.

“Little Sally Dickinson, who didn’t like to go to bed early,” said Mrs. Bateman. “Law, how you’ve grown, my dear!”

“My name is Araminta Perry,” drawled that remarkable person with great solemnity.

“Sally Dickinson, my love,” said Mrs. Bateman, “I should know you anywhere.”

It was now the turn of Mrs. Plunket to grow bewildered.

“There is a mystery here,” said she. “If she is Araminta Perry she cannot be Sally Dickinson, and if she is Sally Dickinson she cannot be Araminta Perry.”

All concerned seemed to feel that this was sound reasoning.

“That is quite right, ma’am,” Mrs. Bateman agreed. “It is common sense and human nature.”

“Are you r-r-really Aunt Caroline?” The blue eyes of Miss Perry grew rounder and rounder.

“Of course I am, my love,” said the cook affectionately. “And very proud to be the aunt of such a bouncing girl as you.”

It was left to the practical intelligence of the housekeeper to find a solution to the puzzle.

“I presume,” said she to Miss Perry with great severity, “that Bateman is the name of your Aunt Caroline.”

“Oh, no,” said that Featherbrain.

“No!” gasped Mrs. Bateman.

“No!” said Mrs. Plunket. “Then what, pray, is the name of your Aunt Caroline?”

The fair Araminta knitted her brows. Was there ever anything so unlucky? The name of her august relation had passed clean out of her head.

"I don't remember," drawled Miss Featherbrain in the throes of mental conflict.

"You don't remember!" said Mrs. Plunket. "Upon my word!"

Mrs. Plunket and Mrs. Bateman subjected Miss Perry to a prolonged scrutiny.

"There," said Mrs. Bateman triumphantly, "it is just as I said. She is Sally Dickinson."

"Try to remember the first letter of your aunt's name." The tone of the housekeeper sounded harsh in the ear of the cook, but it seemed to make no particular impact upon Miss Perry.

That Featherbrain mustered all her battalions. She knitted her brows more heavily, she clasped her wicker basket yet more firmly. In the process of time an inspiration came to her.

"She's the Countess of Something!"

Mrs. Plunket sat bolt upright, as if moved by an invisible spring.

"The Countess of Something!" Upon one side of her face was incredulity, upon the other was dismay. Then she gazed bleakly at the cook.

"The Countess of Crewkerne," said Miss Featherbrain with an air of triumph.

Mrs. Bateman gave a little howl.

"Oh, lord!" Mrs. Bateman simply turned and bolted.

Mrs. Plunket, as became her exalted position, showed herself of finer mettle.

"Miss Perry," said she with a dignity that was really admirable, "I apologize for a most unfortunate mistake. It is exceedingly regrettable. I hope you will be so kind as not to mention the matter to her ladyship."

Miss Perry promised not to do so with an amiability that was very reassuring.

Marchbanks was promptly summoned.

“A most unfortunate mistake has been made,” said Mrs. Plunket to that ambassador. “Miss Perry is her ladyship’s niece.”

To say that a feather would have knocked Marchbanks over is to state the case lightly. Yet even in the depths of his consternation he directed a glance of solemn unbelief at the preposterous hat.

“Please announce Miss Perry’s arrival to her ladyship,” said Mrs. Plunket, “but do not mention anything else.”

Marchbanks was besieged with doubt as he made his way to the blue drawing-room. In spite of Mrs. Plunket’s remarkable statement, incredulity still reigned in his mind. It was possible that a hideous error had been committed; and yet in the ripeness of his judgment he clearly foresaw the possibility of committing another. He had the housekeeper’s authority that the nondescript creature who had come with a corded box in a four-wheeler, who wore an unseemly hat, unmentionable gloves and boots, and who had attempted to shake hands with him, was her ladyship’s niece; but all the same, he had his own opinion.

Marchbanks entered the blue drawing-room on the horns of a dilemma. It was difficult to know what line to take.

He was glad to observe that Lady Crewkerne was alone with her gentlewoman. They were engaged in a game of piquet; and Miss Burden was just about to be rubiconed, an indignity she suffered on an average three times a day.

Marchbanks approached his mistress, and having waited while she claimed two for the last trick, said—

“A young person of the name of Perry is arrived, my lady.”

The old woman looked at the butler bleakly.

“Pray what is that to do with me?”

For the moment it seemed that the name of Perry had passed as completely out of her head as if it had never been in it, and the question she put to Marchbanks was precisely the one that diplomatist desired her to answer herself.

"She appears to have business with your ladyship."

"Very odd," said Caroline Crewkerne. "A young person of the name of Perry."

And then quite suddenly the light dawned upon her.

"Of course," she said to her gentlewoman; "I had forgotten. That girl of Polly's."

Like a hawk she swooped down upon the luckless Marchbanks.

"Tell me, Marchbanks," she said, "what you mean precisely by a young person of the name of Perry. Do you wish me to infer that she is not a lady?"

It was as tight a corner as Marchbanks had ever been in. Yet he yielded to none in professional wisdom.

"I don't wish to infer, your ladyship, that she might not be a lady," said Marchbanks cautiously.

"It appears to me," said his venerable mistress, "that you are getting too old for your place. I will see my niece, Miss Perry."

"Thank you, my lady," said Marchbanks, a bead of perspiration gathering slowly upon his forehead.

## CHAPTER VI

### UNWARRANTABLE BEHAVIOR OF TOBIAS

LADY CREWKERNE sat very upright to receive her niece.

All the same, a subtle air of triumph may have been hovering round the impassive figure of Marchbanks as he announced Miss Perry. For that irresponsible creature still retained her hooded cloak, the preposterous hat was there in all its *naïveté*, her frock looked more shrunken and her cobbled boots more conspicuous than ever, and in her left hand the wicker basket tied with string was very firmly borne.

As a preliminary measure, the old woman gazed through her spectacles at her *protégée* with a resolution that was truly awful. But more than this was required to defeat Miss Perry.

“Oh, how do you do?” That irresponsible came forward, completely enveloping Aunt Caroline in a most gracious beam. “I hope you are *quite* well.”

The presiding genius of the blue drawing-room gave a snort. She looked Miss Perry up and she looked Miss Perry down, from the top of the luckless hat to the soles of the cobbled boots. Slowly the Amazonian proportions, which the general inadequacy of the outgrown garments seemed to enhance, sank into the ruthless critic. The grim old mouth relaxed in frank astonishment.

“Dear me!” it said. “How uncomfortable!”

Miss Perry was not really abashed, although the turban, the spectacles, the ebony cane, the hawklike features and

the day-of-judgment demeanor certainly gave pause to that Featherbrain. At least, she opened her eyes very wide and gripped her wicker basket very firmly.

The old woman's truculent gaze fell upon that unfortunate accompaniment.

"What, pray, is that contrivance?" she demanded.

Miss Perry tucked the wicker basket under her arm.

"Oh, if you please, Aunt Caroline," she said with a drawl that was quite irresistibly foolish, "this is Tobias."

"Tobias!" said the old woman suspiciously. "Who, pray, and what, pray, is Tobias?"

Lady Crewkerne was not alone in her suspiciousness. It was shared by Ponto. That overfed animal, having made a very good luncheon indeed, was curled up at the feet of his mistress. Yet at the mere mention of Tobias—whether by an association of ideas or by a process of mental telepathy peculiar to the dumb creation would be difficult to say—Ponto began to grow decidedly restless.

"I trust," said Aunt Caroline, viewing the wicker basket with an increasing disfavor, "that Tobias is not any kind of an animal."

In sympathy with his mistress, Ponto opened his eyes and began to grow uncommonly wide-awake.

"Tobias is just a sweet," said Miss Perry with a charming air of reassurance. "He is just an old precious."

Lady Crewkerne became so arctic as she turned her attention to the custodian of Tobias that both Miss Burden and Marchbanks were chilled to the marrow.

"If Tobias is a living thing, and there is every reason to believe that it is, I forbid it the blue drawing-room. And I consider it an act of gross impertinence—"

However, before Aunt Caroline could conclude a speech which was meant to exterminate both Tobias and his custodian, there befell a really terrible occurrence.

Whether Tobias, growing incensed at his excommunication, became violent in his basket, or whether his custodian was so much distressed as to relax her hold upon it, will never be known with any degree of certainty. But right in the middle of Aunt Caroline's peroration the wicker basket fell with a thud on to the carpet.

At the same instant the lid fell off in the most dramatic manner. Two yellow shin pads, scarred with honorable service in the hockey field, and a long, lean, brown body flew out together. Miss Burden screamed; and incredible as it may appear, Ponto shot straight up the window curtains, and feeling dear life to be at stake, proceeded to balance himself very precariously upon the pole that ran across the top.

Miss Burden approached the verge of hysteria. Marchbanks seemed overwhelmed. As for the owner of Tobias, she picked up the yellow shin pads with leisurely and charming unconcern, quite as if nothing had happened. Aunt Caroline's nerves were undoubtedly shaken; all the same, she kept command of a lively and vigorous self-possession.

She gathered her black silk dress about her, and poised her ebony walking stick determinedly, and then stormed.

"What is it?" she demanded. "Tell me, is it a snake?"

Miss Burden screamed.

Araminta returned the yellow shin pads to the wicker basket with a leisureliness that was highly reassuring.

"Speak, girl," stormed Aunt Caroline. "What is it? If you have dared to introduce a live reptile into my drawing-room you shall both leave this house immediately."

Even this decree did not perturb Miss Perry. Her natural stolidity was quite unimpaired.

"Oh no, dearest Aunt Caroline," she drawled. "Tobias is not a snake."

“Humph! Very reassuring! What is he, then?”

“He is only a ferret.”

The old woman breathed blood and fire.

“A ferret!” she stormed. “In my drawing-room! I positively forbid anything of the kind. Marchbanks, remove it immediately, and then have the goodness to fetch Ponto down from the curtain pole.”

Marchbanks did not quite know how to grapple with the situation. To begin with, although his experience of men and things was very wide, he had never handled a ferret in his life. And, again, it was not easy to know where Tobias had got to.

“Remove it immediately,” stormed Aunt Caroline.

Very cautiously Marchbanks stooped to peer under the table. To his infinite relief Tobias was not there.

However, the hawklike eyes of his mistress soon detected the whereabouts of the alien presence.

“It is behind the window curtains.”

Marchbanks approached the window curtains very warily. But even then he was unable to see Tobias.

“There it is,” said the mistress. “In the corner there. Approach quietly. And if you value your fingers be careful where you put them.”

Marchbanks appeared to value his fingers so much that nothing seemed farther from his intention than to bring them into the vicinity of Tobias.

“Why don’t you do as you are told, man? There it is in the corner, straight in front of your nose.”

Marchbanks, however, still seemed wholly unable to locate Tobias.

It was left to Miss Perry to play the part of the goddess out of the machine. That Featherbrain, having clearly realized the situation at last, came forward to the window curtains, open basket in hand, in the friendliest and most reassuring manner.



"He is just a sweet," she said for the benefit of Marchbanks. "If you take him round the throat gently he never bites a soul. There he is, the duckums!"

Marchbanks appeared still unable to see Tobias.

"Do you think," said Miss Perry, "I had better take him myself?"

"Girl," stormed Aunt Caroline, "I certainly think you had better."

Marchbanks, who seemed quite to share the opinion of his mistress, stepped back haughtily several paces.

"Come along, then." Miss Perry began cooing to the window curtains. "Come along, Toby, then." She knelt down and began to grope. "Come along, Toby, boy. There he is, the sweet!"

Very deftly she made a grab at the lurking, lean, brown form of Tobias, took him by the throat, popped him into the open basket and fastened down the lid.

"He wouldn't bite a soul." She stood up with a smile of invincible friendliness. "He is just a precious."

"Carry it into the hall," ordered Aunt Caroline. "Have the goodness, Marchbanks, to fetch down Ponto."

Poised very insecurely upon a chair, Marchbanks found it by no means easy to induce Ponto to quit his place of refuge. At length, however, he was able to restore the quivering creature to his mistress.

In the meantime Araminta, with affectionate pride, had carried the wicker basket into the hall.

"Miss Burden," said the old woman truculently, "that girl deserves to be whipped."

As soon as Araminta returned Aunt Caroline, with uplifted finger, ordered her to approach.

"Come here, girl. I think your behavior is disgraceful. Were you brought up in a barn?"

Such a direct and ruthless mode of address caused a

flow of color to overspread the extremely picturesque countenance of Miss Perry. Quite suddenly her large blue eyes swam with tears.

“Tobias did not mean any harm,” said she. “He *is* such a sweet. It was not his fault that I dropped the basket.”

“No more of Tobias, if you please. Now understand”—up went a lean finger—“upon no pretext whatever do I allow ferrets to enter my drawing-room. I really—I—upon my word——!”

Aunt Caroline subsided in an incoherent gurgle of indignation.

Meanwhile, the sight of tears, as was always the case, had moved the tender heart of Miss Burden.

“Dear Lady Crewkerne,” she said, “Miss Perry has had quite a long journey. She must be tired, I feel sure. Would she not like a little refreshment?”

The mention of the word refreshment seemed unmistakably to touch a responsive chord in the susceptible mechanism of Miss Perry.

“Bring some tea.” Aunt Caroline addressed Marchbanks very gruffly. And then to the culprit with really tremendous austerity, “Would you like something to eat?”

“Oh yes, please,” said Miss Perry. At the same time she mopped up her tears with an absurdly small blue-spotted handkerchief.

“What do you eat as a rule?” The sarcasm was not in the least obvious to Miss Perry.

“I eat bread and jam as a rule.”

“Humph!” With her grim eyes the old woman scrutinized her niece as if she were a rare specimen in the Zoölogical Gardens. “Bread and jam,” said she. And then, with an air of really tremendous sarcasm, “Have the goodness, Marchbanks, to bring some bread and jam.”

Lady Crewkerne made a second survey of Miss Perry, from the crown of the luckless straw hat to the soles of the cobbled boots, while that young woman folded up the handkerchief neatly and returned it to a mysterious pocket. In a remarkably solemn manner she then stood wondering what was going to happen.

“Sit down,” said the old woman.

Miss Perry sat down spaciously upon a chair that was particularly fragile.

“The most uncomfortable creature I have ever seen,” said Lady Crewkerne in an aside to her gentlewoman. “Quite out of place in a drawing-room.” And then to the visitor: “Have you ever been in a drawing-room before?”

Miss Perry had been, it appeared.

“Where?”

“We have one at home,” drawled Miss Perry, “but it is only a little one.”

“Ah!” said the old woman. “And where is your home, pray?”

“I live at the Vicarage at Slocum Magna.”

“Humph! Some kind of clerical bear garden, I presume.”

The providential reappearance of Marchbanks came to the aid of Miss Perry. He bore a massive silver tray, with a teapot equally massive upon it. There was also an exquisite plate of old blue china. Upon this were five tiny pieces of bread and butter, each a little larger than Miss Perry’s thumbnail, each arranged at an artistic angle, and each spread with a very thin layer of jam.

A choicely-wrought Indian table was set before Miss Perry. Marchbanks placed the silver trap upon it.

Miss Perry sat very upright indeed. “Thank you *ever* so much.” Her air was so charmingly sincere that it

went some way towards reconciling Marchbanks to many things.

Again the old woman had recourse to her spectacles. From the general irony of her demeanor it was clear that she was expecting developments. She was not disappointed.

For a moment Miss Perry appeared to be rather troubled by the waferlike texture of the bread and jam. It was only for a moment, however. Without waiting to pour out the tea into the tiny blue china cup provided for its reception, she proceeded very carefully to pile each of the waferlike pieces of bread and jam one upon another. Having thereby formed a tolerable morsel, Miss Perry opened a very large mouth and placed gently but firmly therein the five pieces as one.

Lady Crewkerne met the half-frightened gaze of her gentlewoman with a look that no pen can describe. But Miss Perry masticated her morsel very slowly, with supreme unconcern.

“Miss Burden, have the goodness to ring the bell.” The politeness of Aunt Caroline was formidable.

Marchbanks obeyed the summons. As a preliminary measure his mistress fixed that diplomatist with her eye. She literally dared him to move a muscle.

“Another plate of bread and jam, Marchbanks.”

The butler’s bow would have done no discredit to a Foreign Office reception.

“Thank you *ever* so much,” said Miss Perry.

Lady Crewkerne turned to Miss Perry, who appeared to be greatly stimulated by the morsel she had eaten and still further by the prospect of one to follow.

“By the way, where is Slocum Magna?”

Miss Perry’s blue eyes, which by now were quite dry, opened to a width that was astonishing. The ignorance of London people was most remarkable.

“Slocum Magna is the next village to Widdiford,” said Miss Perry impressively.

“Ah, yes, the next village to Widdiford. One ought to have known.”

The manner in which Miss Perry tried to gloss over the painful ignorance of her august relation was a triumph of good breeding. “They haven’t *quite* got the railway at Widdiford yet, don’t you know, but it is only three miles away.”

Slowly, with a grim chuckle, Aunt Caroline repeated this statement.

The arrival of the second relay of bread and jam imposed silence upon Miss Perry. She displayed equal efficiency in dealing with it. Miss Burden still looked a little frightened, while Ponto raised himself on his fore-paws with a look of open admiration.

“By the way, what is your name?” said Aunt Caroline.

A pause of some length was necessary for Miss Perry to cope with such a leading question.

“My name is Araminta,” said she, carrying her drawl to such a ridiculous length that even Ponto might have been excused for smiling at it, “but they call me Goose because I am rather a sil-lay.”

The beak of the old woman seemed to take an additional curve. The hanging-judge look had never seemed so awe-inspiring.

“Your name is Araminta,” she repeated with a deliberation that was positively sinister, “but they call you Goose because you are rather a silly. Do they indeed!”

Miss Perry beamed upon Lady Crewkerne with a friendliness that was perfectly distracting.

“I don’t think I am really a silly,” said she, as if she were quite convinced that she were not, “but Muffin says I am. It’s because I can never remember whether

Tuesday comes after Monday or whether Monday comes after Tuesday."

"Who, pray, is Muffin?"

"Muffin is my sister, don't you know. Her name is Elizabeth really, but we call her Muffin because she is rather a ragamuffin."

"Humph!" said Aunt Caroline.

By nature Lady Crewkerne was grave and grim, but it was Miss Burden's opinion that she had never looked quite so grave and quite so grim as in the course of this first interview with the late Lady Augusta's second daughter.

Said the old woman in a truculent aside: "This comes of mixing the breed. Polly was a born fool, but she was never equal to this. What is to be done with the creature? It was my intention to marry her respectably so that she might be a help to her family, who are as poor as mice and who appear to live like pigs. But who, pray, will marry a natural?"

Miss Burden, however, was at heart incurably romantic. She demurred with a vigor she seldom displayed.

"She is a singularly beautiful girl. Her manner is delightfully her own. She is formed like a goddess and she is perfectly charming."

"Faugh!" said the old woman ruthlessly. "Miss Burden, you are a born fool. The creature is an idiot. Look at her now."

Araminta had renounced her chair for a very good reason. She was sitting now in the middle of the sofa. Her lips were slightly parted and one finger was unmistakably in her mouth. Her blue eyes were gazing, gazing into the far inane. Moreover, they appeared to be a trifle moist. The fact was that at that moment she was back at the Vicarage at Slocum Magna. Her sister Polly was pouring out tea for seven in really sensible cups,

and Araminta herself was engaged in carving a piece of bread in accordance with her personal fancy. At the Vicarage it was the rational rule always to cut your own bread and spread your own jam; and these comestibles being made at home, were among the very few things of which you could have as much as you wanted.

Doubtless it was an unfortunate moment for the higher criticism to observe Miss Perry.

“An extraordinary creature!” proclaimed Aunt Caroline.

“I am reminded of some one,” said Miss Burden, “yet I cannot think who. It is somebody who is celebrated.”

“That abandoned straw hat! It appears to have been used originally for carrying vegetables.”

“She reminds me of some one,” said Miss Burden plaintively. “Who can it be, I wonder?”

Before this interesting speculation could be carried farther an event of the first magnitude happened. Marchbanks solemnly announced: “The Earl of Cheriton!”

## CHAPTER VII

### A THROWBACK

**B**EARING a modest parcel with a certain ostentation, Lord Cheriton entered the blue drawing-room.

"Caroline," said he, "as I was leaving my barber's it suddenly occurred to me that for the first time in forty years I had forgotten your birthday. Last year I ventured to offer you a Bible. This year I bring this."

My lord cut the string of the parcel and handed his gift to Caroline Crewkerne.

With a grim, but not ungraceful inclination of the second best turban, the recipient divested the present of its numerous trappings. A small but expensive hand-glass was exposed to view.

"Thank you, Cheriton. A very charming present."

"I hope it pleases you, my dear Caroline," said Cheriton, with quite the *bel air*. "You have so long defied time that one felt you might like a memento of its impotence."

"Thank you, Cheriton. It is very kind of you to remember an old woman."

"A woman is as old as she looks—as Byron says."

"Byron?"

"I ascribe every truism to Byron. It confers a factitious importance and at the same time is perfectly safe. Everybody pretends to have read Byron, yet nobody has."

"Miss Burden has read him, I believe."

That lady sighed romantically.



Lord Cheriton shook his finger with arch solemnity. "No boy under the age of twenty," said he, "should be allowed to smoke cigarettes. And no woman under forty should be permitted to read Byron."

Caroline Crewkerne snorted.

"By the way," said Cheriton, "now I am here I must pay homage to my duchess."

My lord took a half turn in the direction of the sofa. Still seated in the middle, in her pensive attitude, was Miss Perry. She was still gazing, gazing into the inane; and she was a little in the shadow.

Immediately to the left of Miss Perry, intervening between her and Aunt Caroline, was the object that for the moment claimed the whole of Cheriton's attention. Rightly so, indeed, for it was nothing less than one of the world's masterpieces. It was a full-length portrait in a massive gilt frame: a truly regal canvas in the meridian splendor of English art. Beneath the picture was the magic legend, "Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, by Gainsborough."

Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, was a young girl in her teens, in a hat of the period. Her ineffably simple countenance was a glamour of pink and white; her lips were slightly parted; the wonderful blue eyes were fixed upon vacancy; and one finger was unmistakably in her mouth.

Cheriton, having fixed his eyeglass with some elaboration, slowly backed a few paces and fell into the pose he always affected in the presence of this noble work.

In silence he absorbed the poetry, the innocence, the appeal of youth. He sighed deeply.

"Caroline," he said, "I would give a whole row of Georgiana Devonshires for this. In my humble judgment it has never been equaled."

"Grandmamma Dorset wears well," said Caroline with a grim chuckle.

"It ought to be called 'Simplicity,' it ought to be called 'Innocence.' Upon my word, when I look at the divine Araminta I always feel that I want to shed tears."

Caroline Crewkerne snorted.

"Cheriton," said she, "I have noticed that when a man begins life as a cynic he ends invariably as a sentimentalist."

"You are a pagan, Caroline." Her old friend sighed deeply. "You have no soul."

"Miss Burden has a soul," said the contemptuous Caroline. "In my opinion she would be better without it."

"How ironical it is that you who distrust art so profoundly should have such a masterpiece in your drawing-room!"

"I understand that a committee would like to buy it for the nation," said the owner of the masterpiece with a gleam of malice.

"But years ago you promised that if the time ever came when money could buy Araminta she should go to Cheriton House."

"Well, the time has not come yet."

"It will," said Cheriton shrewdly. "And then I shall hold you to your promise."

While Cheriton continued his examination of a noble work said Caroline Crewkerne to her gentlewoman—

"My spectacles, please."

Cheriton turned away from the picture at last. Naturally enough his gaze fell on the sofa. Sitting in the exact center thereof was the astonishing Miss Perry. She was still at Slocum Magna. She had got to her third slice of bread and jam. Polly was pouring out a second sensible cup. Dearest Papa had just made one of his jokes. Charley and Milly were having an argument as to who was entitled to the cake with the almonds in it. Miss

Perry's blue eyes were unmistakably moist; and although she was not actually sucking her finger, there could be no doubt that at any moment she might begin to do so. And the inverted vegetable basket that crowned her seemed to flop more than ever.

It was no wonder that my lord gave a little exclamation. A lover of beauty in all its manifestations, he had an eye for nature as well as for art. And here, side by side with Gainsborough's masterpiece, making due allowance for a number of trifling details which did not in the least affect the subject, was an almost uncanny replica of that immortal work. Cheriton, in spite of his foibles, had a seeing eye. Notwithstanding the cobbled boots, the print frock and the cloak with the hood, one thing was clear. Here was Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, in the flesh.

He swung round to his old friend, the glass leaping out of his eye.

"Caroline," he cried, "a throwback!"

The old woman gazed through her spectacles at the occupant of the sofa. Miss Perry, still at Slocum Magna, was seriously considering whether a fourth slice of bread and jam was within the range of practical politics.

"Cheriton," said Caroline coolly, "I believe you are right."

Surprise and enthusiasm began to play sad havoc with the amateur of the fine arts.

"Upon my word," said he, "it is the most wonderful thing I have ever seen in my life. A pretty trick of old Mother Nature's."

"Don't be a coxcomb, Cheriton."

"A perfect throwback!"

Once more the gaze of my lord was brought to bear on the sofa's occupant, whose hair was the color of daffodils and whose eyes were like the sky of Italy. The *empres-  
ement* of his manner was a little overwhelming.

“There is no need to ask,” said he, “whether the famous duchess is a kinswoman.”

Miss Perry returned from Slocum Magna with a little start. She removed her finger from her lip, yet her thoughts were not of famous duchesses.

In the meantime the redoubtable Caroline said nothing. All the same, she was watching everything with those terrible eyes of hers.

Miss Perry showed neither surprise nor embarrassment at being summoned from Slocum Magna so peremptorily by such a superb specimen of the human race. Perhaps her amazing blue eyes opened a little wider and she may or she may not have hoisted a little color; but it really seemed as if her thoughts were more concerned with bread and jam than with Lord Cheriton.

“Forgive an old worshiper of your famous ancestress if he asks your name,” he said. “I hope and believe it is a legitimate curiosity.”

Miss Featherbrain made an effort to cease wool-gathering. She smiled with a friendliness that would have disarmed a satyr.

“My name is Araminta.” The drawl was hopelessly absurd. “But they call me Goose because I am rather a sil-lay.”

Cheriton gave a chuckle of sheer human pleasure. He felt that a new joy had been offered to an existence which had long exhausted every æsthetic form of delight.

“Your name is Araminta,” he repeated by a kind of hypnotic process, “but they call you Goose because you are rather a silly.”

Miss Perry rewarded Lord Cheriton with an indulgent beam which assured him that it was his happiness to interpret her correctly. It was not easy for such a connoisseur to withdraw his enchanted gaze, but he was able to do so at last. He turned to his old friend.

“Caroline,” he said, “the fairies have fulfilled my wish. I have always wanted to meet a Gainsborough in the flesh and to hear what she had to say for herself. And now I have done so I know why Gainsborough painted ‘em.”

“Faugh!” The old woman snorted vigorously. “Sentimentality is the national bane.”

“No, Caroline, you’ve no soul. Why don’t you present me?”

“My niece, Miss Perry. Lord Cheriton, an old friend.”

“Oh, how do you do.” Miss Perry shot out her hand in her own private and particular manner to Aunt Caroline’s old friend. “I hope you are *quite* well.”

My lord’s inclosure of the ample paw of Miss Perry, which nevertheless, speaking relatively, contrived to appear long and slender, in his own delicately manicured fingers was almost epic.

“Miss Perry,” said he, “this is a great moment in my life.”

“Don’t be a coxcomb, Cheriton,” said Caroline with great energy. It was so necessary that the wearer of the inverted vegetable basket should not get notions under it before she had been in Mayfair an hour.

“My dear Miss Perry”—it was the magniloquent air with which my lord asked an occasional question in the Gilded Chamber—“are you acquainted with the vast metropolis?”

“I have always lived at Slocum Magna,” said Miss Perry with divine simplicity.

“Oh, really!” said my lord, with insincere surprise. “By the way, where *is* Slocum Magna?”

Doubtless owing to the fact that she was a duke’s granddaughter Miss Perry had excellent if somewhat rustic breeding. Brains were not her strong point, but she had been long enough in London to anticipate almost

instinctively Lord Cheriton's inquiry. Moreover, her astonishment at the ignorance of London people was softened by the friendly indulgence she offered on the slightest pretext to all the world and his wife.

"Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry, without the least appearance of didacticism, "is the next village to Widdiford. They haven't *quite* got the railway at Widdiford, yet, don't you know, but it is only three miles away."

The absence of the railway at Widdiford seemed a deciding factor in my lord's course of action. With the air of a man whose mind is quite made up, he addressed the fair inhabitant of Slocum Magna, North Devon.

"As an old friend of your accomplished aunt," said he, "I feel that during your sojourn in the vast metropolis it is only wise and right that I should act, as it were, *in loco parentis*."

Although Miss Perry's papa was a very good classic, he had been unable to communicate his excellence in the dead languages to his second daughter. Her eyes expressed an earnest desire for a little more enlightenment.

"A sort of combination, you know," said Cheriton lucidly, "of a courier, a cicerone and a sincere well-wisher. One feels sure it will help you at first to have some one to guide you through the traffic."

"Thank you ever so much," said Miss Perry. "It will be too sweet."

"Miss Burden is fully competent to see that she doesn't get run over," said the tart voice of Aunt Caroline.

"Also, my dear Miss Perry," said the mellifluous Cheriton, "you may like a little occasional advice from a man of the world. Our vast metropolis is full of pitfalls for your sex."

"We have poachers at Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry thrillingly.

"The metropolis is different. One regrets to say that it harbors every known form of wickedness."

Miss Perry's eyes opened so wide that they seemed to magnetize my lord.

"Are there r-r-robbers?"

"A great number. They lurk in every thoroughfare. If you really don't know our vast metropolis you must have advice and protection."

"How splendid!" cried Miss Perry. "I shall write to tell Muffin."

"Would it be an unpardonable curiosity if one asks who is Muffin?"

"My sister, don't you know. Her name is Elizabeth really, but we call her Muffin because she is *rather* a ragamuffin."

"A singularly interesting family, if one may say so without impertinence."

"Papa says we are none of us very bright, but we are all of us very healthy, excepting Doggo, who has had the mange twice."

My lord softly repeated the dictum of Miss Perry's papa. Then in a truly paternal fashion he sat on the sofa by her side.

"Do tell me about your papa," he said. There was a whimsical look in the faded eyes. "One ought to have so many things in common with such a papa as yours."

"Papa is just a sweet—" began Miss Perry, with a perfectly delightful fervency. But she did not get far.

Aunt Caroline lifted a stern finger.

"Araminta," said she, "Miss Burden will take you to your room."

Miss Perry rose at once with a docility that was charming. She bestowed her most frankly indulgent beam upon Lord Cheriton before quitting the drawing-room in Miss Burden's care.

Cheriton screwed a glass into an astonished eye to gaze after so much magnificence.

"A goddess! Juno! A great work of nature!"

"Don't be a coxcomb, Cheriton," said the warning voice.

My lord prepared to take his leave.

"I am afraid, Caroline," said he, "your memory begins to fail a little."

"Rubbish!"

"Do you know how long it is since you asked me to dine with you?"

"You refused three times running. I am determined that no human being shall refuse a fourth."

"Well, I will dine with you this evening."

"Thank you, Cheriton," said Caroline dryly. "Eight o'clock."

"Eight o'clock." And he took his leave with a jauntiness that recalled a long-vanished youth.

Two hours later my lord was back in Hill Street. He looked particularly *soigné* in the choicest of evening clothes. They fitted his corseted form to perfection.

"Where is the fair Miss Araminta?" said he, yielding his arm to his hostess.

"My niece is dining upstairs this evening," said Caroline Crewkerne.

Profoundly distrusting the sherry and the claret, the guest made a modest demand for a whisky and soda. The fare was scanty, but what there was of it was not ill cooked. Also Caroline was not so tiresome as he had anticipated. She was a little uplifted, no doubt, by the events of the day. This very sharp-witted old woman had already foreseen that the appearance of a highly original niece in a moribund *ménage* might bring the world back to Hill Street. The spectacle of Cheriton



seated between Miss Burden and herself was a happy augury.

Hope lent an old-time pungency to what had once ranked as the most malicious tongue in London.

"Upon my word, Caroline," said the enchanted guest, "you are quite at high-water mark this evening."

The compliment was perfectly sincere. There can be little doubt, all the same, that throughout a rather unexhilarating meal my lord was sustained by the hope of seeing the peerless Miss Araminta in the drawing-room afterwards. In this, however, he was disappointed. The tardy minutes passed, but Miss Araminta did not appear. At last in desperation he inquired, "Where hides the reluctant fair?"

"Speak English, Cheriton."

"The adorable Miss Perry."

"The creature is in bed. It is a long journey from Slocum Magna for a growing girl."

"Is one to understand that she made the entire journey in a single day?"

"In something under twenty-four hours, I believe. Express trains travel at such a remarkable rate in these days."

There was only one thing for Cheriton to do in the circumstances. He took his leave.

*En route* to the Gaiety Theater, in the privacy of his hansom, he ruminated exceedingly.

"That old woman," he mused, "has got all the trumps in her hand again. A disagreeable old thing, but she does know how to play her cards."

The stall next to Cheriton's was in the occupation of no less a person than the Duke of Brancaster.

"Hallo, George, you in London!"

"Ye-es," said his Grace heavily. He did not seem to be altogether clear upon the point. "The War

Office people are in their usual mess with the Militia."

"But *she* is at Biarritz."

"There is another now," said George succinctly.

The noise and flamboyance of the ballet seemed to render further conversation undesirable. Cheriton, however took up the thread at the end of the act.

"George," he said solemnly, "like myself you have grown old in the love of art."

George's response was of the gruffest. Cheriton was going to be a bore as usual.

"You remember that Gainsborough of Caroline Crewkerne's?"

"Ye-es," said George. "I should like it for my collection. I offered her twenty thousand pounds."

"Did you though! Well, mind you don't renew your offer. The refusal of that picture was promised me in Crewkerne's lifetime."

George began to gobble furiously. He looked as though he wanted to call some one a liar.

"Well, it's too soon to quarrel over it," said Cheriton pacifically. "She don't intend to part with it to anybody at present."

"A perverse old woman and age don't improve her."

"I mentioned her Gainsborough," said Cheriton, who was on the rack of his own enthusiasm, "because a very odd thing has happened. The original of that picture has found her way to Hill Street."

"What! Grandmother Dorset!" said the contemptuous George. "Why, she's been in her grave a hundred years."

"An absolute throwback has turned up at Hill Street. If you want to see a living and breathing Gainsborough in twentieth-century London call on Caroline Crewkerne some wet afternoon."

George Betterton was not at all æsthetically minded. But like so many of his countrymen he always had a taste for "something new."

"I will," he said. And he spoke as if he meant it.

Then it was that Cheriton grew suddenly alive to the magnitude of his indiscretion. Really he had acted with consummate folly! He had a clear start of all the field, yet through an unbridled enthusiasm and a love of imparting information, he must needs within an hour set one of the most dangerous men in England upon the scent.

His Grace had limitations, but where the other sex was concerned he was undoubtedly that, as Cheriton had reason to know. A widower of sixty or so, who had twice married without obtaining an heir to a great estate, there was reason to believe that for a third time he meant to beard fortune, although of late, to be sure, his way of life had hardly seemed to point in the direction of matrimony. But Caroline Crewkerne, who knew everything, seemed quite clear upon the point.

Yes, George Betterton's "I will" had a sinister sound about it. Cheriton himself was a year older than George, and a bachelor who in his heart had good reason to believe that he was not a marrying man. His position in the world had long demanded that he should do his duty; but, to the scorn of his family and the amusement of his friends, it was unfulfilled as yet. He was too fond of adventures, he declared romantically—a confession that ill became a man old enough to be a grandfather, said the truculent Caroline. More than once, it is true, Cheriton had feared that he had seen the writing on the wall. Closer examination had proved, however, that it was intended for some one else!

He had left Hill Street that evening in such a state of emotion that in his present mood he was inclined to be-

lieve that he had seen the writing again. It was odd, no doubt, at his time of life that such a man as himself should have such a feeling. But there is no accounting for these things. Thus he left the theater with the idea rooted in him already that he had been guilty of an act of gross folly in exalting the horn so soon. Why play Caroline's game? It should have been left to her to summon this second Richmond to the field.

"Caroline will lead him a dance though," mused my lord on the threshold of Ward's. "And I know how to handle the ribbons better than he does. He's got the head of a rocking-horse."

In the meantime the cause of these reflections was lying very forlorn and very wide-awake in the most imposing room in which she had ever slept. The bed was large but cold; the chintz hangings were immaculate but unsympathetic; the engravings of classical subjects and of august relations whom she had never seen with which the walls were hung, the solemn magnificence of the furniture and the ornate character of the bric-à-brac, made Miss Perry yearn exceedingly for the cheerful simplicity of Slocum Magna.

Almost as far back as Araminta could remember it had been her privilege before attempting repose to beat Muffin over the head with a pillow. But in this sublime piece of upholstery, which apparently had been designed for an empress, such friendly happenings were not to be thought of.

However, she had Tobias with her. The wicker basket was on a small table of Chinese lacquer by her bed; and as she lay, with a slow and silent tear squeezing itself at recurring intervals out of her blue eyes, her right hand dwelt firmly but affectionately on the lid of Tobias's local habitation. That quaint creature, all unconscious of the honor done him, was wrapped in slum-

ber, his ugly brown nose tucked under his lean brown paws.

Thus was Araminta discovered at half-past ten that evening when Miss Burden came to say good night.

"I want to go home to Slocum Magna," said the visitor with a drawl and a sob, whose united effect must have been supremely ridiculous but for its pathos.

Miss Burden had only the consolations of one intimately acquainted with pathos to offer. Every night for many long and trying years she had longed to go home to her own rustic hermitage, which, however, had no existence outside her fancy.

"Dearest Araminta," said Miss Burden, embracing her affectionately, "you will soon get used to the strangeness."

"I want to go home to Slocum Magna," sobbed Miss Perry.

"I am sure you are a good and brave and noble girl," said Miss Burden, who believed profoundly in goodness and bravery and nobility.

"Papa said I was," sobbed Miss Perry, setting her hand more firmly than ever upon the basket of Tobias.

"To-morrow you will feel happier, Araminta dearest," said Miss Burden, bestowing a final hug upon her.

Miss Burden was guilty of saying that which she did not believe, but perhaps no one will blame her.

## CHAPTER VIII

### “CAROLINE CREWKERNE’S GAINSBOROUGH”

FROM the moment that “Caroline Crewkerne’s Gainsborough” came upon the town there was no denying her success. She was a new sensation; and happy in her sponsors, the diminished glories of Hill Street emerged from their eclipse. If Lady Crewkerne found a grim satisfaction in exploiting the nine days’ wonder, Lord Cheriton was one of the proudest men in London. He took to himself the whole merit of the discovery.

“I assure you,” he declared to a circle of the elect, “that blind old woman would never have seen the likeness. It was quite providential that I happened to look in and point it out.”

In matters of art Cheriton had taste. Therefore he was sensitive to beauty. Every morning for a week he called at Hill Street to envisage his discovery in the full light of day. It was in vain, however, that he tried to surprise her. She was kept very close.

For one thing the creature had positively no clothes in which to submit to the ordeal of the public gaze. Almost the first thing Lady Crewkerne did was to send for her dressmaker, who was commanded to make Miss Perry “look respectable,” and was given only three days in which to perform the operation.

“I assure your ladyship it is impossible in three days,” said the dressmaker.

"If that is your opinion," said her ladyship, "I shall go elsewhere."

As it was Lady Crewkerne's custom to pay her bills quarterly, on the morning of the fourth day Miss Perry appeared at breakfast in a suit of blue serge. Rigid in outline and formal in cut, it had been chosen by Miss Burden, and was wrought in the style affected by that model of reticence.

It was in this attire, surmounted by a straw hat of the regulation type in lieu of the inverted vegetable basket, that Cheriton saw Miss Perry for the second time.

"What are you thinking of, Caroline?" he said tragically. "Where is your instinct? It is an act of vandalism to consign a genuine Gainsborough to the tender mercies of a woman's tailor."

"Pooh!" said Caroline.

All the same, Cheriton was roused to action. Next day at noon a cab appeared at the door of Caroline's abode. It contained a milliner and twenty-two hats in twenty-two boxes. The milliner's instructions were to wait for Lord Cheriton.

Caroline's first instinct was to order the milliner off the premises.

"Gross impertinence!" she declared.

However, the perverse old woman had a liberal share of reason. Cheriton had his foibles, but emphatically he knew on which side of the bread to look for the butter. In all matters relating to this world, from Italian cooks to French millinery, wise people respected his judgment.

At five minutes past noon Cheriton himself came on the scene. He was accompanied by an amiable, courteous, and distinguished foreigner.

"Pray, what is the meaning of this?" said Caroline with a snort of hostility.

"This is Monsieur Duprez," said Cheriton, "the great

genius who comes to London twice a year from Raquin's at Paris."

Monsieur Duprez, overwhelmed by this melodious flattery, nearly touched the Persian carpet with his nose. Caroline scowled at him.

"Cheriton," she demanded, "who has given you authority to turn my house into a dressmaker's shop?"

"I have the authority of a pure taste, unvitiated by Whig prejudice and Victorian tradition. Miss Burden, will you have the great goodness to summon Nature's masterpiece, so that Art, her handmaiden, may make an obeisance to her; and might I also suggest that you procure Lady Crewkerne's knitting?"

Miss Burden, thrilled by the impact of romance, waited for permission to obey my lord.

"I will not have my niece tricked out like a play-actress," said Caroline. "Please understand that clearly."

Cheriton, feeling the position to be impregnable, was as cool as you please. Caroline was so much the slave of her worldly wisdom, that in a case of this kind she would be compelled to bow the knee to a panel of experts. Besides, Cheriton was able to justify himself in the most dramatic manner. He pointed histrionically to the world-famous Duchess of Dorset.

"Caroline," said he, "three experts are present. They can be trusted to deal with this matter effectually. Indeed, I might say four. Miss Burden, I know you to be in cordial sympathy with the highest in whatever form it may manifest itself. Therefore I entreat you, particularly as the time of Monsieur Duprez and Madame Pelissier belongs not to themselves nor to us but to civilization, to produce our great work of Nature, so that Art, her handmaiden, may deck her."

Caroline's upper lip took a double curl, a feat which



was the outcome of infinite practice in the expression of scorn.

"I hope you will not put ideas into my niece's head. Fortunately, she is such a born simpleton that it is doubtful whether she is capable of retaining any. Miss Burden, you may fetch the creature."

It was a charming April morning, and sunshine was flooding the room. It made a halo for Miss Perry as simply and modestly she came in. At once it challenged the wonderful yellow mane that was the color of daffodils, which on its own part seemed to reciprocate the flashing caresses of the light of the morning. The yellow mane appeared to grow incandescent and shoot out little lights of its own. Very wonderful, too, was the glamour of pink and white and azure, as the sunlight toyed with it in its own inimitable manner. Here was Juno indeed, and none recognized the fact so clearly as the Prince of the Morning.

Monsieur Duprez' eyes sparkled; Madame Pelissier gave a little exclamation.

"You have here a great subject," said Lord Cheriton to those rare artists. "And there you have the manner in which the great Gainsborough treated it."

Madame Pelissier disclosed her creations. Hat after hat was fitted to the daffodil-colored mane. Cheriton hovered round the young goddess, surveying the effect from every point of view. His gravity could not have been excelled by a minister of State.

"They must be enormous," said he with an ever-mounting enthusiasm. "They must sit at the perfect angle. Their hue must be as the wing of the raven. Yes, feathers decidedly. And they must flop like the dooce."

"Cheriton," said the warning voice, "don't be a coxcomb."

"Yes, I like that wicker-work arrangement. The way it flops is capital. It will do for week days. But there must be one for Sunday mornings in which to go to Church."

Madame Pelissier was inclined to see an affront in my lord's extreme fastidiousness. There was not a hat in the whole collection which had quite got "that," he declared, snapping his fingers in the manner of Sir Joshua.

"Madame," he said solemnly, "pray invoke your genius to create a Sunday hat for Juno. You observe what Gainsborough did for her great-grandmamma. Mark well that masterpiece, *chère madame—je prends mon bien où je le trouve.*"

"*Carte blanche, milor?*" said Madame Pelissier with a little shrug.

"*Absolument,*" said my lord. "Give a free hand to your genius, *chère madame*. Crown the young goddess with the noblest hat that ever consecrated the drab pavements of our metropolis."

"I warn you, Cheriton," said the aunt of the young goddess, "I will not have the creature figged out like a ballet dancer or a female in a circus."

"Peace, Caroline. Your knitting." He shook an admonitory finger. "Really, you must refrain from Philistine observations in the presence of those who are dedicated to the service of Art."

Caroline snorted with dynamic energy.

Monsieur Duprez, crowing with delight, was absorbing Gainsborough's masterpiece.

"I haf it," said he, tapping the center of his forehead, "ze very ting."

"May it prove so, monsieur, for then we shall have a nine days' wonder for the town."

Thus it was in the beginning "Caroline Crewkerne's Gainsborough," as she was so soon to be christened by

the privileged few who write the labels of history, owed much to Cheriton's undoubted talent for stage management.

She really made her *début* at St. Sepulchre's Church—in which sacred and fashionable edifice Aunt Caroline was an occasional worshiper—and afterwards in Hyde Park on the second Sunday morning in May.

At least a fortnight before the event Cheriton had declared his intention to the powers that obtained in Hill Street of making Miss Perry known to London on the first bright Sunday morning that presented itself. It was due to the courtesy of Providence that her church-going clothes arrived the evening before the weather; whilst but a few hours previously, at the instance of the experts, a deft-fingered maid had appeared on the scene, one learned in the set of hats and frocks the most marvelous, who was a rare artist also in the dressing of the human hair.

Therefore Miss Perry was the innocent cause of some excitement when she burst upon an astonished world. Marchbanks was the first to behold her, when on this historic second Sunday morning in May she quitted the privacy of her room becomingly clad to render homage to her Maker. He saw her as she came down the marble staircase in an enormous black hat with a wonderful feather, a miracle of harmonious daring, and in a lilac frock, not answering, it is true, in every detail to that in which her famous great-grandmamma had been painted by Gainsborough, but none the less a thing of superlative beauty. However, to judge by the shocked stupefaction of the virtuous man who first encountered it, this was an achievement not to the taste of everybody. In the opinion of Marchbanks it might be magnificent, but it was hardly religion.

By one of those coincidences in which real life indulges

so recklessly, Miss Perry reached the bottom of the stairs as Cheriton entered the hall. My lord with mustache freshly dyed and locks newly shorn, and wearing light gray trousers, lilac gloves, white gaiters and a gardenia in his buttonhole, was filled with ecstasy.

His greeting was almost as melodramatic as his appearance.

“A triumph!” he cried. “My dear young lady—my dear Miss Perry—my dear Miss Araminta, the highest hopes of a sanguine temperament have been exceeded. Art has done her work nobly, but the real triumph, of course, belongs to Nature.”

“Isn’t my frock a nice one?” crowed Miss Perry.

“Incomparable.”

“It is almost as nice as the mauve one Muffin had last summer but one.”

Cheriton felt that the speech of Miss Perry was quite absurdly suited to her clothes. He led her proudly to the morning room.

“Caroline,” he said, “prepare for the conquest of London.”

That old woman had never looked so fierce. She snuffed the air like a lioness.

“Cease behaving like a fool,” she said to her gentlewoman, “and have the goodness to get my spectacles.”

Miss Burden obeyed in a kind of delirium. Lady Crewkerne’s scrutiny was severe and prolonged, but there was no approbation in it. “An old-fashioned respect for my Maker,” said she, “precludes my going to church with a *tableau vivant*.”

Cheriton scorned her openly.

“You perverse creature,” he said, “why are you so blind? Here is a triumph that will ring through the town. Are you prepared to identify yourself with it or are you not?”

Caroline Crewkerne subjected her niece to a second prolonged and severe scrutiny.

"Humph!" was the ungracious verdict.

However, this was a very shrewd old woman. Further, she was a very clear-sighted old woman, who knew herself to be what Cheriton did not hesitate to proclaim her. She was a Philistine. Upon any matter affecting the higher amenities she was far too wise to trust her own judgment. Cheriton, on the other hand, in spite of an inclination towards the bizarre and the freakish, she allowed to have taste.

"I shall go to church," she announced.

It was as if she were flinging down a gauntlet.

The Church of Saint Sepulchre, as the elect do not need to be told, is quite near to Hill Street. Lady Crewkerne was ready to start ten minutes before the service began.

"Easy, Caroline," said Cheriton, studying his watch reflectively; "there is no hurry."

"Even if one is to be bored," said Caroline, "it is good manners to be punctual."

Cheriton, however, seemed determined that the service should begin without him. He loitered and loitered upon the most absurd pretexts. And just as the procession was about to start from Caroline's door he mislaid his umbrella.

## CHAPTER IX

### IN WHICH CHERITON DROPS HIS UMBRELLA

**N**EVER mind your umbrella," said Caroline tartly.

"I must mind my umbrella," said Cheriton plaintively. "If one goes to church in London in the middle of the season without one's umbrella one is bound to be taken for an agnostic."

"John," her ladyship demanded, "what have you done with his lordship's umbrella?"

"You placed it here, my lord," said John, indicating an umbrella with an ivory handle and a gold band.

"Nonsense!" said Cheriton. "I don't own an umbrella with an ivory handle."

John looked at the gold band, and imperturbably assured his lordship that his name was upon it.

"It is the name of my father. How the dooce did an umbrella with an ivory handle come into the possession of my father!"

The clock in the hall slowly chimed eleven. They set out for St. Sepulchre's with the redoubtable Caroline in a decidedly unchristian temper, with Miss Burden profoundly uncomfortable, and Miss Perry innocently absorbed in her new frock and preoccupied with a modest hope that the passers-by would notice it; whilst Cheriton walked by her side apparently without a thought in his head save the ethical significance of an ivory-handled umbrella.

"I remember now, my dear Araminta. It was given

to my grandfather of pious memory as a token of esteem by that singularly constituted monarch George the Fourth."

"I am sure that it must be almost as nice as Muffin's was," said Miss Perry. "That old gentleman with the white mustache turned round to look at it."

"Did he?" Cheriton fixed his eyeglass truculently.

"Muffin's was mauve," said Miss Perry. "But I think lilac is almost as nice, don't you?"

"It is all a matter of taste, my dear Miss Araminta. Fancy one entering a church in the West End of London with an umbrella with an ivory handle!"

"Why shouldn't one, pray?" snorted Caroline from the depths of her Bath chair.

"My dear Caroline, it looks so worldly."

"Humph!" said Caroline.

When the procession reached the outer precincts of Saint Sepulchre's its ear was smitten by the sound of a thousand fervent voices uplifted in adulation of their Creator.

"There, Cheriton," said Caroline, "now you are satisfied. We are late."

This fact, however, did not seem to perturb Cheriton as much as it ought to have done. He even deprecated the alacrity with which Caroline left her Bath chair and the determined manner in which she prepared to lead the way into the sacred edifice.

"Easy, Caroline," said he. "Let 'em get fairly on to their legs."

As the procession filed very slowly down the central aisle with the fervent voices still upraised and the organ loudly pealing, more than one pair of eyes took their fill of it. There was hardly a worshiper within those four walls who did not know who the old woman was with the hawklike features and the ebony walking stick. Nor

were they at a loss for the identity of the distinguished if slightly overdressed personage who came in her train. Moreover, the wonderful creature in the picture hat and the lilac frock did not fail to inspire their curiosity.

Caroline Crewkerne's pew was at the far end of the church, next but two to the chancel. Her entourage had reached the middle of the aisle when there came a brief lull in the proceedings. The organ was muffled in a passage of peculiar solemnity, the fervor of the voices was subdued in harmony; there was scarcely a sound to be heard, when Cheriton had the misfortune to drop his umbrella.

The sound of the ivory knob meeting cold marble at a moment so solemn was quite dramatic. There was not a soul within those precincts who could fail to hear the impact of the ill-fate umbrella. For the umbrella was indeed ill-fated. Upon the marble, in three pieces, lay the ivory handle. Almost every eye in the church seemed to be fixed upon the owner of the umbrella. A wave of indignation appeared to pass over the congregation. Not only did the owner of the umbrella come late to church, but he must needs imperil the sanctity of the occasion by mundanely dropping his umbrella with extraordinary violence and publicity.

Here, however, was not the end of the matter. With a naturalness so absolute did the Amazon with the daffodil-colored mane and the amazing clothes stoop to assist her cavalier to retrieve the fragments of the shattered umbrella, that it seemed to the scandalized witnesses that she had mistaken the central aisle of Saint Sepulchre's at 11.15 A. M. on the second Sunday of May for the middle of Exmoor.

Caroline Crewkerne and her gentlewoman had been kneeling devoutly upon their hassocks at least two minutes by the time Cheriton and Miss Perry arrived at the



pew second from the chancel. Cheriton bore in his right hand a fragment of ivory; in his left the decapitated body of his umbrella. Somehow his look of rue did not seem quite so sincere as the circumstances and the surroundings warranted. In the right hand of Miss Perry was a Prayer Book, in the left two fragments of ivory. The gravity of her demeanor was enough to propitiate the most sensitive beholder.

After the service, as Caroline Crewkerne's party was moving out of the church, it was joined by no less a person than George Betterton. Like Caroline herself, he was an infrequent worshiper at Saint Sepulchre's.

"Hallo, George!" was Cheriton's greeting. "What has brought you to church?"

Cheriton was not sincere in his inquiry. He knew perfectly well what had brought George to church. The responsibility for his appearance there was his entirely.

"The weather," was George's solemn reply. "Fine mornin' to hear a good sermon."

"I don't approve of candles on the altar," said Caroline Crewkerne in a voice for all the world to heed. "Far too many Roman practices have crept into the service lately."

"Quite right, Caroline," agreed Cheriton. "That is my own opinion. I intend to lodge a complaint with the Vicar."

"How are you, Caroline?" said George with affability. "It is a great pleasure to see you at church."

"It is a pleasure you might afford yourself oftener," said Caroline grimly.

George cast an envious eye to the front. Cheriton, walking with the lilac frock and the picture hat ten paces ahead of the Bath chair, appeared to be coming in for a good deal of public attention.

"What's it feel like, Caroline," said George Betterton, "to go to church with Grandmother Dorset?"

"You mean my niece, Miss Perry, I presume?" was the "stuffy" reply.

"Perry, eh? A girl of Polly's?"

"Don't you see the likeness?" said Caroline with a little snort.

"No, I don't. She resembles Polly about as much as Cheriton resembles a Christian."

"There I agree with you, George."

"Reminds me of what you were in the fifties, Caroline." Obviously George was trying to be agreeable.

The recipient, however, seemed a little doubtful of the compliment.

"Gal's on the big side. A reg'lar bouncer, but, by gad, she carries her clothes like Grandmother Dorset."

"It's a great responsibility," said Caroline, "for one of my age to have a creature like that to look after."

"Money?"

"Not a sou."

George thought it a pity. "Fine-lookin' gal though. Cheriton seems to think so anyway."

The hiatus between the Bath chair and the first pair in the procession had now been increased to twenty paces.

"Cheriton," called her ladyship, "this is not a coursing match."

My lord checked politely to await the arrival of the powers.

"Dear me," he said, "*are* we walking quickly? Miss Araminta moves like a Naiad in her own West-country."

"Girl," said Aunt Caroline, "pray remember that you are now in Hyde Park, not in a Devonshire lane."

"You come from Devon," said his Grace, addressing Miss Perry with an air of remarkable benevolence, "where the cream comes from, eh?"

To assert positively that Miss Perry made a gesture of licking her lips in a feline manner will surely incur a

tornado of feminine criticism. For no true lady could be guilty of such an act walking on a Sunday morning in Hyde Park with the highest branch of the peerage. All the same, it looked uncommonly like it.

"They promised to send me some from Slocum Magna," she said wistfully, "but it hasn't come yet."

"Shame!" said his Grace with feeling. "I'll nip round to Gunter's first thing to-morrer and order a pot."

"Oh, thank you *ever* so much," cooed Miss Perry.

"Pray don't mention it, my dear Miss ——," said the Duke with a somewhat heavy yet by no means unsuccessful air.

"My name is Araminta"—Miss Perry drawled her usual formula—"but they call me Goose because I am *rather* a sil-lay."

"Call you Goose, eh? Charmin' name. I'll call you Goose myself if you've no objection."

"Oh do, please," said Miss Perry, "then I shall know we are friends."

"Shall I tell you, Miss Goose, what they call me?"

"Oh do, *please*."

"They call me Gobo, because they say I gobble like a turkey."

"What a splendid name!" cried Miss Perry. "I shall write to tell Muffin about it."

The Amazon's clear peal of laughter seemed to excite the curiosity of a section of the British public which occupied the chairs along the path. Certainly it eyed the slow-moving procession very intently indeed.

"My aunt, here comes a stepper!" said the proprietor of cool but youthful tones, removing a silver knobbed stick from his mouth. "What price the old sportsman with her?"

"Ssssh, Archibald!" said a sibilant whisper; "that's the Duke of Brancaster."

“A lucky old perisher,” said the voice of youth. “But if I was that gal I wouldn’t walk in the Park with a chap who has a face like an over-ripe tomato and who gobbles like a turkey.”

“Ssssh, Archibald, dearest!”

The procession was now almost alongside the youthful critic. Miss Perry, a positive queen challenging the May morning in its glamour and its freshness, and her chin at a rather proud angle, for she could not help rejoicing simply and sincerely in the attention that was paid to her new frock, was flanked on the one hand by my lord, on the other by his Grace. Ten paces in the rear came the Bath chair with its hawklike occupant. Beside it was Miss Burden with Ponto on a lead.

“I tell you what,” said the voice of youth, “if those two old bucks are not ridin’ jealous they will be jolly soon.”

“If you call me Goose”—the ludicrous drawl was borne on the zephyrs of spring—“I may call you Gobo, may I not?”

At this moment a voice issued from the Bath chair.

“George,” it said, “have you noticed the tulips?”

“No,” said George, “where are they?”

His Grace gazed down at his feet to see if he had trodden upon them.

“Miss Burden, take the Dook across the road to look at the tulips.”

Reluctantly, perhaps, his Grace allowed himself to be piloted by Ponto and the faithful gentlewoman towards these choice specimens of British horticulture.

“Cheriton,” said Caroline Crewkerne, “to-morrow you must take my niece to view the pictures in the National Gallery.”

“That will be too sweet,” cried Miss Perry.

Cheriton bestowed upon his old friend and adversary a look of wariness tempered with gratitude.

## CHAPTER X

### JIM LASCELLES MAKES HIS APPEARANCE

**M**ISS ARAMINTA PERRY, Hill Street, Mayfair, London, W., to Miss Elizabeth Perry, The Vicarage, Slocum Magna, North Devon.

DEAREST MUFFIN,—London is a much larger place than Slocum Magna, but I don't think it is nearly so nice. If I had not got Tobias with me, I think sometimes I might be very miserable.

First I will tell you about my new frock. It is a lilac one, and has been copied from a famous picture of Great Grandmamma Dorset by a painter named Gainsborough—I mean that Gainsborough copied Great Grandmamma Dorset, not that he made my frock. Madame Pelissier made my frock. It is not quite so nice as your mauve was, but it is much admired by nearly everybody in London. When I walk out in it people often turn round to look.

I think the people here are sometimes rather rude, but Lord Cheriton says I am not to mind, as people are like that in London. Lord Cheriton is a Sweet. Aunt Caroline says he is much older than he looks, but Miss Burden doesn't think so. Aunt Caroline is always right in everything, but Miss Burden is just too sweet. She is very good to Tobias, and comes to my room every night to see if I am miserable. Aunt Caroline thinks she is too romantic. She had a love affair when she was younger.

Lord Cheriton says I must be careful that I don't have one as they are so bad for the complexion. He says there is not a man in London who can be trusted. Oldish men, particularly if they have been married twice, are very dangerous, he says. As Dearest Papa is not here to advise me, Lord Cheriton acts as he thinks Dearest Papa would like him to. He goes with me everywhere to see that I come to no harm. Isn't it dear of him?

Yesterday afternoon Lord Cheriton took me to the Zoölogical Gardens to see the elephants. Aunt Caroline thought we should find so many things in common. I know we had one thing in common. We are both very fond of cream buns. I had four and one of the elephants had five. But Lord Cheriton says that elephants are so big you can't call them greedy. We also saw the bears. They each had a cream bun apiece. Lord Cheriton says each of them would have eaten another, but he thought it hardly right to encourage them.

Lord Cheriton is a very high-principled man. He says I am to be most careful of a perfectly charming old gentleman who calls most days to see Aunt Caroline. I call him Gobo because he gobbles like a turkey, and he calls me Goose, because I am rather a silly. He is a Duke really. Lord Cheriton doesn't seem to trust him. He says it is because of his past life. I heard Lord Cheriton tell Aunt Caroline that she ought not to encourage the old reprobate with me in the house. It is rather dreadful that he should be like that, because he is such a dear, although his face is so red and he gobbles like anything. He—Gobo—is going to give me a riding horse so that we shall be able to ride in Rotten Row together every morning as it is so good for the health. He says my horse will be quite as nice as Squire Lascelles' pedigree hunter. I don't think Lord Cheriton approves of it. He thinks Dearest Papa would not like me to be

seen much in public with a man who has no principles.

Miss Burden thinks so too. But she agrees with Lord Cheriton in everything, because she considers he is the most perfect man she has ever met. Miss Burden says his ideals are so lofty, but Aunt Caroline says that all men and most women are vain, worldly and self-seeking. I wish Aunt Caroline could meet Dearest Papa. And you too, Muffin dearest. But I do think Lord Cheriton is a Sweet. He took *so* much trouble over my lilac frock and my new hat, which I don't think I like because it makes people stare so; and he is so careful I should come to no harm, and always tries to act just as he thinks Dearest Papa would like him to. I am sure Aunt Caroline is mistaken. Lord Cheriton thinks the people in London are so cynical; there is something in the atmosphere of London, he says, that turns the milk of human kindness sour. Isn't it dreadful? I am so glad we haven't that kind of atmosphere at Slocum Magna, Muffin dearest.

Lord Cheriton is frightfully clever. Some of the words he uses are quite as difficult as Dearest Papa's. He says I am a Throwback. I can't find out what it means. He says it is a dictionary word, yet I can't find it in Aunt Caroline's dictionary. Aunt Caroline says I am too inquisitive. Please ask Dearest Papa. He will know for certain.

Lord C. is very good at poetry. He says it is because he went to the same school as Lord Byron. He has written what he calls an Ode to a Lilac Frock. It begins like this:—

“Youth is so fair that the Morning's smile,  
Is touched with the glamour of a pure delight.”

I cannot remember any more, and Aunt Caroline burnt

the copy he gave me herself personally. She said he was old enough to know better. But I think it is awfully clever of him, don't you, Muffin dearest? Miss Burden was very miserable about the ode—I mean about Aunt Caroline burning it. She scorched her fingers in trying to rescue it from the flames. She has a new lilac frock, because Lord Cheriton admires them so much. I think she looks Too Dear in it, but Aunt Caroline says she would look a frump in anything. Aunt Caroline always says what she means, but I don't think she always means what she says. When Tobias, poor darling, escaped from his basket and hid behind the drawing-room curtains she said some dreadful things.

Aunt C. says if I behave myself I am to go to Buckingham Palace to see the Queen. If I do go I am to have another new frock, although I am sure I shall never get one half so nice as my lilac. I do wish I could go in that. I am sure the Queen would like it; but when I said so to Aunt Caroline she told me to hold my tongue. The frock I am going to see the Queen in is all white, which Lord Cheriton says is his favorite color because it is the emblem of innocence.

I have not had one game of hockey since I came to London. Lord C. says they only play hockey in London when the Thames is frozen over, which happens only once in a blue moon. I do call that silly, don't you, Muffin dearest, when we have a mixed match at Slocum Magna every Wednesday all through the winter.

Last night I went to a party in my new evening frock. Everybody liked it—at least they said they did. One or two young men told me they admired it immensely. Wasn't it dear of them? Lord C. and Gobo were there. They didn't think it a bit too low. I am so pleased. I wish, Muffin dearest, that you and Polly and Milly had one like it, because it is awfully expensive. And what



do you think? Aunt Caroline has given me a pearl necklace which once belonged to Great Grandmamma Dorset to wear with it.

Next Wednesday fortnight Aunt Caroline is going to give a dance for me. It was Lord Cheriton who persuaded her, and he is arranging everything. But they cannot agree about the champagne for supper. Aunt Caroline says that claret cup was considered good enough when she came out. Lord Cheriton says that civilization has advanced since those days.

Then, too, Muffin dearest, I must tell you that Aunt Caroline and Lord C. have almost quarreled over Gobo. Lord C. says the harmless old dear must not be invited on any account. He says that if Gobo comes to the dance he will abuse the wine, yet drink more of it than is good for him, and that he will play bridge all the evening and be a nuisance to everybody. I suppose Lord Cheriton will have to have his way, because he is acting as a sort of deputy to Dearest Papa. He has already kissed me several times "paternally," which is really too sweet of him; and every day he warns me to beware of Gobo and to be very careful that he does not go too far.

This is all this time, Muffin dearest. I send heaps and heaps of love and kisses to you and Polly and Milly and Dickie and Charley and poor old Doggo; and to Dearest Papa I send twelve extra special kisses. I remain always your most affectionate sister,

GOOSE.

P.S.—Tobias sends fondest love.

It will be seen from this letter that although the conquest of London by the lilac frock and the daffodil-colored mane proceeded apace, all was not harmony in Hill Street, Mayfair. To Cheriton's stage management much of the triumph was due, but unfortunately he was

the last man in the world to underrate his own achievement.

“Feller can’t carry corn,” was the trite manner in which George Betterton summed up the situation.

No two persons knew Caroline Crewkerne quite so well as these old cronies. And no one save Caroline Crewkerne knew them quite so well as they knew each other. A very experienced hand was called for to hold the balance true. And in that worldly-wise old woman one was undoubtedly forthcoming.

Well it was so. For it was wonderful how soon it was bruited abroad that two Richmonds had already entered the field. Both were men of position and more popular in the parish of Saint James than in Caroline’s opinion they ought to have been. She knew them far too well to have any illusions about them.

Caroline’s opinion, however, did not prevent their entrances and exits in Hill Street at all hours of the day and of the evening soon becoming a subject of comment. Moreover, the gods were watching them. And after the ancient manner, they promptly inserted a bee in Cheriton’s cool and sagacious bonnet.

“My dear Caroline,” he announced one morning, “do you know I have taken a fancy to having a copy of Grandmother Dorset made for the little gallery at Cheriton House.”

“Humph!” said Caroline ungraciously.

“Don’t say ‘Humph!’ Caroline. It makes you look so plain.”

“I have never allowed that picture to leave my drawing-room for public exhibition or for any other purpose, and I don’t see why I should do so now.”

“There is no need for it to leave your drawing-room,” said Cheriton persuasively. “A man can come here to

copy it if you will grant him the use of the place of a morning."

"I fail to see why my drawing-room should be turned into a painter's studio."

"It is quite a simple matter," Cheriton explained. "A curtain can be rigged up and drawn across the canvas and you won't know it's there."

Caroline yielded with reluctance.

"There is a young fellow of the name of Lascelles, whom I believe to be competent to make a passable copy."

"A Royal Academician?"

"God bless me, no!"

"I cannot see why I should grant the use of my drawing-room to a person who is not a member of the Royal Academy. And what an inferior copy by some wretched dauber will profit you, one cannot imagine."

"I am afraid," said Cheriton with an air of one imparting a state secret, "I am going Gainsborough mad. If at present I can't have Grandmother Dorset for Cheriton House, I intend having something as like her as I can get. And, in my opinion, this young fellow Lascelles is the very man to make a copy of the peerless original. He is a fine draughtsman, his sense of color is highly trained, and, like myself, he is a Gainsborough enthusiast."

One fine spring morning James Lascelles, without further preface, found his way to Hill Street, Mayfair. He was armed with the tools of his craft and with a great canvas some eighty-four inches by fifty.

Jim Lascelles was a hearty young fellow, six feet high, and a superb specimen of British manhood. Why a man of Cheriton's penetration, armed with such a sound working knowledge of things as they are, should have walked so blindly into the trap that had been set for him is a matter upon which no amount of speculation can avail.

Doubtless he felt that one so obscure as Jim, who was as poor as a mouse, and in no way immodest in his ideas, could be trusted with such a commission. And doubtless he could have been had they played the game in Another Place. A mortal as wise as my lord should have known that sometimes they don't.

All that Cheriton condescended to know on the subject was that Jim Lascelles "hadn't a bob in the world," and that he was good to his mother. He may even have been dimly aware that the mother of Jim, by a process of reasoning peculiar to her kind, felt that Jim was bound to turn out a great genius. And he may have had a suspicion that on this naïve pretext she had contrived enough from her very modest pittance to give Jim three years' training in Paris in the studio of the renowned Monsieur Gillet. But there is no reason to believe that Lord Cheriton had any special faith in Jim or in his genius. He merely believed that he could entrust a small commission with profit to both parties, to a modest, sound-hearted, pleasantly mediocre young fellow.

At the hour Jim Lascelles made his first appearance in Hill Street he may have been hardly more than that. Sometimes, it is true, he was troubled with visions of coming greatness. But he never mentioned them to anybody, because in his own well-balanced mind he was sure they were due to having supped later than usual. The future worried him but little. Working steadily on, striving to pay his way, he hardly expected to see his "stuff" on the line in the long room at Burlington House, but he did hope the time would come when he would be able to sell it more easily and get better prices from the dealers.

If he could go once in three years to Kennington Oval to see Surrey play the Australians and he could afford a couple of tickets annually for the Chelsea Arts Club Fancy

Ball, and his funds allowed him occasionally to take his mother to the dress circle of a suburban theater to see a cheerful play, and he was always able to buy as much tobacco as he wanted, he didn't mind much that he worked very hard to earn very little. He argued that a good many chaps were worse off than Jim Lascelles. He had splendid health and he had a splendid mother.

No sooner had John received Mr. Lascelles on this memorable forenoon and the mighty canvas that accompanied him, which was in the care of two stalwart sons of labor, than the fun began. In the first place, it was only with infinite contrivance that the canvas was squeezed through the door of the blue drawing-room, which happily was part and parcel of a spacious and lofty Georgian interior. Nevertheless, a sacrifice of white paint was involved in the process.

However, Jim Lascelles showed not the least disposition to be overawed by his surroundings.

"A shocking bad light," he said, surveying the aristocratic gloom of the blue drawing-room with something of a proprietary air. "Better stick it there."

John, not without hauteur, superintended the placing of the unwieldy canvas in the place indicated by the artist. It involved the moving of a sofa six yards to the left. To do this, in the sight of John, almost required a special Act of Parliament. It was certainly necessary to get the authority of the butler before it could be moved an inch. Jim, however, a young fellow who generally managed to get his own way, cheerfully shifted the sofa himself while John was seeking the permission of his chief. When John returned the two stalwart sons of labor were performing their final duties. He had, therefore, to be content with a stern admonition as to where they put their feet while they fixed up the canvas.

Jim Lascelles was not given to unbridled enthusiasms,

but the discovery of Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, by Gainsborough, moved him considerably.

"Ye gods! it is a crime to keep the heritage of the nation in a light like this." He turned to John, who stood the incarnation of outraged dignity. "I say," said he, "can't you draw those blinds higher."

"No, sir," was the supercilious answer, "not without her ladyship's permission."

"Where is her ladyship? Perhaps I might see her."

"Her ladyship is *not* at home, sir."

"Well, those blinds will undoubtedly have to go up higher."

Thereupon Jim Lascelles walked up to the window, unloosed the cords, and hauled up the venetian blinds as far as they would go. Various additional beams of the May sunshine rewarded him.

"Now," said he, "perhaps we shall be able to get some sort of an idea of Gainsborough at his best."

It is open to doubt whether John had a feeling for art. At least he showed no desire to obtain an idea of Gainsborough at his best. He merely turned his back upon Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, and incidentally upon Jim Lascelles, and proceeded haughtily to shepherd the two sons of labor into the street.

The feat accomplished, John made a formal complaint to his official superior.

"That painting feller," said he, "goes on as if the place belonged to him. I don't know what her ladyship'll say, I'm sure."

"John," said the pillar of the Whigs impressively, "if the education of the masses does not prove the ruin of this country, Henry Marchbanks is not my name."

Miss Perry, in her second best frock, the modest blue serge, was descending the stairs.

"Has the painting man come yet?" she inquired.

"Yes, miss, he has," said John with venom and with brevity.

"Do you think I might go in and peep at him?" she said in her ludicrous way. "I should so like to see a real painting man, painting a real picture with paints."

"If you obtained her ladyship's permission, miss, I dare say you may do so," said Marchbanks cautiously.

Miss Perry, however, when her curiosity was fully aroused, was quite capable of displaying a mind of her own. She entered the blue drawing-room noiselessly. There was the painting man with his hands in his pockets. Standing with his back to the door by which she had entered, he was entirely lost in contemplation of the masterpiece he had been commissioned to copy.

"Marvelous!" he could be heard to exclaim at little intervals under his breath, "marvelous!"

His examination of Gainsborough's masterpiece was terminated long before it otherwise would have been by the intervention of a positive crow of human delight.

"Why, it's Jim! It's Jim Lascelles!"

Jim Lascelles turned about with a look of wonder upon his expressive countenance. At first he said never a word; but suddenly he placed both hands upon the Amazonian shoulders of Miss Perry and gave her a shaking of affectionate incredulity.

"It is the Goose Girl!" he cried. "Heavens and ministers of grace!"

Miss Perry was guilty of a second crow of human delight.

"Why, Jim, you've got a mustache!"

"The Goose Girl," cried Jim, "in the blessed old town of London."

"I've been in London three weeks," said Miss Perry importantly.

"I've been in London five years," said Jim Lascelles

sadly. "What a great overgrown thing! You are taller than I am."

"Oh no," said Miss Perry, "I am only six feet."

Jim Lascelles declined to be convinced that such was the case until they had stood back to back to take a measurement.

"You're an absolute what-do-you-call-'em!" he said. "Are you as fond of apples and bread and jam and old boots as you used to be? Or let me see, was it Doggo who used to eat old boots in his youth?"

"I never ate old boots, Jim," said Miss Perry with a great air of conviction.

"Yes, I remember now. Old boots and kitchen chairs were the only things you didn't eat. Your weakness for apples has cost me many a licking."

"Has it, Jim?" The mobile lips of Miss Perry suffered an unmistakable twitch. "Have you ever tasted cream buns, Jim?" she asked wistfully.

"No, you sybarite. We don't get those refinements in the suburb of Laxton. But tell me, how is Muffin, and Polly and Milly, and Dickey and Charley and all the rest of the barbarian horde? And what is the Goose Girl doing so far away from Slocum Magna? How has she found her way into this superlative neighborhood?" The eye of Jim Lascelles was arrested by Miss Perry's formal blue serge. "Governess, eh? How odd that the Goose Girl with the brains of a bumble bee should blossom out into a real live governess!"

"Oh no, Jim. Didn't you know? I have come to live with Aunt Caroline."

"Aunt who?"

"Aunt Caroline," said Miss Perry.

"She must be one of the grand relations the girl Polly used to boast about, that would never have nothing to do with the family of Slocum Magna."



It is to be hoped that neither Aunt Caroline nor Ponto overheard Jim's remarks; it is a fair presumption, in fact, that they did not, otherwise this history must have ended almost before it began. For this was the indubitable moment chosen by Ponto and his mistress to enter the blue drawing-room. The instant Jim Lascelles caught sight of the headdress, the black silk, the ebony walking stick, and the obese quadruped with gargoye eyes, he checked his discourse and bowed in a becoming manner.

"Aunt Caroline," said Miss Perry with a presence of mind which did her the highest credit, "this is Mr. Lascelles, who has come to paint the picture."

The old lady put on her spectacles with polar coolness.

"So I perceive," she said.

She looked Jim over as if he himself were a masterpiece by Gainsborough, and without making any comment she and Ponto withdrew from the blue drawing-room.

"A singularly disagreeable old woman," said Jim, who had the habit of speaking his mind freely on all occasions.

"Aunt Caroline *is* rather reserved with strangers," said Miss Perry, "but she is a dear really."

"She is not a dear at all, and she's not a bit like one. She is just a proud, disagreeable and unmannerly old woman."

Miss Perry looked genuinely concerned. For Jim was hurt, and she felt herself to be personally responsible for Aunt Caroline. However, there was one resource left for the hour of affliction.

"Would you like to see Tobias? I've got him with me. I will fetch the sweet."

"What, is that ferret still alive? My hat!" And then as Miss Perry moved to the drawing-room door, said Jim, "Oh no, you don't. Come back and sit there on the sofa if it is quite up to your weight, and I will show you how to paint a picture."

"Will you, Jim!" Miss Perry returned obediently. "Do you remember teaching me how to draw cows?"

"Yes, I do. You could draw a cow with anybody, and that's the only thing you could do except handle a ferret and eat bread and jam."

Miss Perry sat in the middle of the sofa. By force of habit she assumed her most characteristic pose.

"There was also one other thing you could do," said Jim Lascelles. "When you were not actually engaged in eating bread and jam you could always sit hours on end with your finger in your mouth thinking how you were going to eat it."

Jim took up his charcoal.

"Goose Girl," he said, "it's the oddest thing out. Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, had the habit of sticking her paw in her mouth. And I'll take my Davy her thoughts were of bread and jam."

"Cream buns are *ever* so much nicer," Miss Perry sighed gently.

"You have grown a terrible sybarite since you came to London. Nobody ever suspected the existence of cream buns at Slocum Magna."

Suddenly, without any sort of warning, an idea flashed through the mind of James Lascelles; and this, by some occult means, conferred the look upon him that gets people into encyclopedias.

"Don't move, Goose Girl. Do you know who has painted that hair of yours?"

"I don't think it has been painted," said Miss Perry.

"That is all you know. Your hair has been painted by the light of the morning."

Jim Lascelles laid down his charcoal and took up the brush that on a day was to make him famous. He dipped it in bright yellow pigment; and although, as all the world knows, the hair of Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, is un-

mistakably auburn, Jim began by flinging a splotch of yellow upon the canvas.

"Goose Girl," said Jim with an expression of joy on his face that made him look preposterously handsome, "I have felt sometimes that if it should ever be my luck to happen upon a great subject I might turn out a painter."

"Your mamma always said you would," said Miss Perry.

"And your papa always said you would marry an earl."

Quite suddenly the blue drawing-room vibrated with a note of triumph. "Oh, Jim, I've almost forgotten to tell you about my lilac frock."

"Have you a lilac frock?"

"You remember the mauve one that Muffin had?" said Miss Perry breathlessly.

"After my time," said Jim Lascelles. "But I pity a mauve frock on the back of the Ragamuffin."

"It was too—too sweet," said Miss Perry. "And my lilac is almost as nice as Muffin's mauve."

"Put it on to-morrow," said Jim. "Then I'll be able to see for myself. Now, don't move the Goose Piece, you silly. The light of the morning strikes it fealty. I doubt whether this yellow be bright enough."

"Jim," said Miss Perry, "to-morrow I'll show you my new hat."

"Stick your paw in your mouth. And don't dare to take it out until you are told to. And keep the Goose Piece just where it be. Think of cream buns."

"They are awfully nice," said Miss Perry.

Jim dabbed another fearsome splotch of yellow upon the great canvas.

"Monsieur Gillet would give his great French soul," he said softly, "for the hair of the foolish Goose Girl whose soul is composed of cream buns. Ye gods!"

Why the young fellow should be guilty of that irrel-

evant exclamation who shall say? Perhaps he fancied that he heard the first faint crackle of the immortal laughter. Well, well! we are but mortal, and who but the gods have made us so?

## CHAPTER XI

### MISS PERRY IS THE SOUL OF DISCRETION

**T**HE next morning at ten o'clock, when Jim Lascelles appeared for the second time in Hill Street, Mayfair, he was received in the blue drawing-room by the lilac frock and its remarkable canopy. Jim fell back a step before the picture they presented.

"My aunt!" said he.

"The frock is a sweet," said Miss Perry. "Isn't it? Muffin's——"

"Goose Girl, you are marvelous!"

"I think the hat must flop a bit too much . . . in places. It makes people turn round to stare at it."

"Of course it does, you foolish person," said Jim with little guffaws of rapture. "It is an absolute aboriginal runcible hat. How did you come by it? There are deep minds in this."

"Lord Cheriton chose it."

"My noble patron and employer. It does him credit. That hat is an achievement."

"Aunt Caroline doesn't like it, especially in church."

"Aunt Caroline is a Visigoth. Let us forget her. Sit there, you Goose, where you sat yesterday. And if you don't move or speak for an hour you shall have a cream bun."

It was bribery, no doubt, but Miss Perry prepared at once to earn the promised reward.

"You are so marvelous," said Jim, "that poor painting

chaps ought not to look at you. Oho! I begin to have light. One sees where that lilac arrangement and that incredible headpiece came from. By the way, Goose Girl, is it conceivable that Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, is one of your grand relations?"

"She is my great-grandmamma," said Miss Perry.

"She must be. What has old Dame Nature been up to, I wonder? Copying former successes. And old Sir President History, R.A., famous painter of genre, repeating himself like one o'clock."

Jim Lascelles began to limn the incredible hat with remarkable boldness and vigor.

"By all the gods of Monsieur Gillet," he said vain-gloriously, "they will want a rail to guard it at the Luxembourg."

Yet Jim was quite a modest young fellow. Could it be already that the magic potion was in the veins of a sane and charming youth?

"Goose Girl," said Jim, "it's clear enough that if the Duchess was your great-grandmamma, Thomas Gainsborough, R.A., was my old granddad. Now move not the Goose Piece. She wear-eth a mar-vel-ous hat!" Jim's charcoal was performing all kinds of antics. "Chin Piece *quite* still. Wonderful natural angle. Can you keep good if you remove your paw from your mouth?"

"Yes, Jim, I will try to," said Miss Perry with superb candor and docility.

"Very well, we'll risk it. Keep saying to yourself, 'Only thirty-five minutes more and I get a cream bun.'"

"Yes, Jim," said Miss Perry with an air of intelligence that was almost uncanny.

"Paws down. Hold 'em thusly. Move not the Chin Piece the Young Man said. No and not the Whole of the Pink and White and Blue and Yellow Goose Piece neither."

As Jim continued the study of his great subject his language assumed lyrical form.

"Paws down," said Jim. "She approacheth her Mouth Piece upon the pain of losing her Bun. Paw Pieces quite qui-et. Move not the Chin Piece, the Young Man said."

The blue eyes of Miss Perry were open to their limit. They seemed to devour the slow-ticking clock upon the chimney piece. At last virtue was able to claim its reward.

"Cream bun, please." The drawl of Miss Perry was unaffectedly ludicrous.

"It can't possibly be an hour yet."

"It is, Jim." The conviction of Miss Perry was overwhelming. "It is *honestly*."

"So be it. Young Man taketh Goose Girl's word of honor." From his coat pocket he produced a neat packet. "Goose Girl presenteth Paw Piece," said he, "to receive Diploma of Merit. A short interval for slight but well-deserved nourishment."

Miss Perry lost no time in divesting the packet of its envelope of white paper. A crowd of human delight greeted the seductive delicacy of the contents. And there followed immediately a very large bite out of a bun of quite modest dimensions.

Said Miss Perry: "It is almost as nice, Jim, as the ones that come from Gunter's."

"It is their own brother. This comes from Gunter's."

"R-r-really." It was quite a pyrotechnical display of the letter "r." "But those that Gobo brings me are larger."

"They grow more than one size at Gunter's. Gobo is a bit of a duke, I dare say."

"He is a duke," said Miss Perry.

"If I were a duke," said Jim, "I should bring you the

large size. But as I am only Jim Lascelles, who lives at Laxton with his old mother, you will have to be content with the small ones."

It may have been that Miss Perry was a shade disappointed, because the small ones meant only a bite and a bittock. But she contrived to mask her feelings. Although brought up in the country, she had excellent breeding.

"Jim," said Miss Perry, "where is Laxton?"

"Quite a ducal question."

"Is it as far from London as London is from Slocum Magna?"

"I acquit you of *arrière-pensée*. Here is Lord Cheriton. You had better ask him."

That peer in flawless morning attire entered the room with his most fatherly air.

"Is it my privilege to make you known to one another? My ward, Miss Perry. Mr. Lascelles, the coming Gainsborough."

"Oh, I've known Jim——" Miss Perry began blurting, when in quite the old Widdiford manner Jim Lascelles dealt a stealthy but unmistakable Number Nine Kick on her Best Shin Bone.

Inquired Miss Perry of Lord Cheriton with truly wonderful presence of mind, "Can you tell me where Laxton is?" According to an old-fashioned recipe there is no spur for the wits like a Number Nine Kick on your Best Shin Bone.

"Certainly I can," said my lord with courtly alacrity. "Laxton is an outlying part of our vast metropolis. A most interesting place with many honorable associations."

"Jim," the luckless Miss Perry was beginning, but on this occasion Jim Lascelles had no need to do more than show her his honest right boot, while Cheriton's sense of hearing was by no means so acute as it might have



been; "Mr. Lascelles," Miss Perry managed to correct herself, "lives at Laxton."

"Then we are in a position," said Cheriton, "to congratulate Mr. Lascelles and also to congratulate Laxton. But tell me, Lascelles, why do you live in an outlying part of the vast metropolis when the center so clearly calls you?"

"We live at Laxton, my mother and I, because it is cheap but respectable."

"I trust the presence of my ward Miss Perry does not retard the progress of your artistic labors?"

"Quite the contrary I assure you," said Jim with excellent politeness.

"I am so glad. But as you may have already noticed, Miss Perry has *flair* in artistic matters."

Jim Lascelles, it seemed, had noticed that.

"It is a very remarkable case of heredity. You see, my dear Lascelles, Gainsborough painted her great-grand-mamma."

"So I understand," said Jim with immense solemnity.

"It is such a satisfaction to me, my dear Lascelles, that Miss Perry's taste in art is so sure. We go to the National Gallery together, hand in hand as it were, to admire the great Velasquez."

"He is a sweet," said Miss Perry.

"And, my dear Lascelles, we profoundly admire the great Rembrandt also."

"He is a sweet too," said Miss Perry.

"And, my dear Lascelles, together we share—Miss Perry and I—a slight distrust of the permanent merit of Joseph Wright of Derby. The fact is, Joseph Wright of Derby somehow fails to inspire our confidence. One can understand Joseph Wright of Sheffield perfectly well; or even perhaps—mind I do not say positively—Joseph Wright of Nottingham; but I put it to you, Lascelles,

can one accept Joseph Wright of Derby as belonging to all time?"

"I agree with you, sir," said Jim. "Yet was there not once an immortal born at Burton-on-Trent?"

"One has never heard that there was," said Cheriton with an air of pained surprise. "And that is a matter upon which one is hardly open to conviction. By the way, Lascelles, which of England's fair pastures had the glory of giving birth to your genius?"

As a preliminary measure Jim Lascelles showed Miss Perry his boot.

"I was born," said Jim modestly, yet observing that the blue eyes of Miss Perry were solemnly fixed on his boot, "at a place called Widdiford in the North of Devon."

"Yes, of course, I ought to have guessed as your father and I were together at Harrow. I clearly remember that it was the opinion of the fourth form common room that the finest clotted cream and the choicest strawberry jam in the world came from Widdiford."

"It is almost as nice at Slocum Magna," said Miss Perry, in spite of the covert threat that was still lurking in Jim's right boot.

"Oh, really!" said my lord. "Happy, happy days of youth, when the cream was really clotted and the strawberries were really ripe! But one seems to remember that Widdiford is celebrated for something else."

Miss Perry was prepared to enlighten Lord Cheriton, but Jim's boot rose ferociously.

"Stick paw in Mouth Piece," came a truculent whisper, "and merely *think* of cream buns."

"Widdiford," said Cheriton. "In what connection has one heard that charmingly poetic name? Ah, to be sure, Widdiford is the place at which they have not *quite* got the railway, don't you know."

"Yes," said Miss Perry, "but it is only three miles away."

"And what is the proximity of Widdiford to Slocum Magna?"

"The best part of two miles," said Jim Lascelles, boldly taking the bull by the horns. "Rather a coincidence, isn't it, sir, that we should have been at the Red House at Widdiford and that Miss Perry should have lived at the Vicarage at Slocum Magna? In fact, I seem to remember Miss Perry or one of her sisters as quite a tot of a girl sitting as good as pie in the vicarage pew."

Here it was that Jim's boot did wonders. Miss Perry was simply besieged by voices from the upper air urging her to give everything away completely. She refrained, however. Her respect for Jim's boot enabled her to continue sitting as good as pie.

Cream buns are very effective in certain situations, while in others an uncompromising right boot may be equally successful. To Jim Lascelles belongs the credit of having assimilated this admirable truth quite early in life.

Cheriton turned to see what progress Jim had made with his labors.

"Capital progress, Lascelles," said he. Yet something appeared to trouble my lord. "Upon my word, either one's eyes betray one or the color of your lady's hair is yellow."

"Is it, sir?" said the innocent James. "Why, yes, as yellow as the light of the morning."

"The hair of the Duchess is unmistakably auburn."

"Why, yes," Jim allowed; "but really, sir, don't you think yellow will do just as well?"

Cheriton gazed at Jim Lascelles in deep astonishment.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I hope you appreciate the terms of the commission. You are asked to make a precise and exact copy of Gainsborough's Duchess of Dorset for Cheriton House, not to execute a *tour de force* of your own. Really, Lascelles, that hair! And the set of the hat is surely not that of the original. I almost think, my friend, you will have to start again."

Jim put his hands in his pockets. Upon his handsome countenance was a very whimsical if rather dubious expression.

"Lord Cheriton," he said solemnly, "if I could have afforded to lose a cool hundred pounds, which I don't mind saying is more than all I earned last year, I should not have accepted this commission. As I have accepted it I shall do my best; and if the results are not satisfactory I shall not look for remuneration."

"Well, Lascelles, that is a straightforward proposition certainly. I hope you have not fallen into this confounded French method of looking at things. The hair of that girl is enough to make Gainsborough turn in his grave. Take a fresh canvas, my friend."

Jim Lascelles laid his head to one side. He sighed a little, but there was a twinkle in his eye. Beyond a doubt the yellow was extremely bold and the hair of the Duchess was auburn.

What of the cause of the mischief? There she sat on the sofa in her favorite pose, blissfully unconscious of the trouble she had wrought, for it hardly admitted of doubt that her thoughts were of cream buns. And further, it seemed to Jim Lascelles that beyond question her hair had been painted by the light of the morning. Cheriton, however, was too much preoccupied with the Duchess to observe that fact.

"My dear Miss Araminta," said he, "as this is a really fine morning, and this is really the month of May, let us

stroll into the park and watch young England performing aquatic feats on the Serpentine. And after luncheon, if the weather keeps fine, we will go to the circus.”

“It will be too sweet!” said Miss Perry.

## CHAPTER XII

### JIM LASCELLES TAKES A DECISIVE STEP

CAROLINE CREWKERNE'S "Wednesdays" had not been so well attended for years. They had been at their meridian two decades earlier in the world's history, when the spacious house in Hill Street was the fount of some of the most malicious gossip to be obtained in London. But time's passing had bereft Caroline of something of her vigor and perhaps still more of her *savoir-faire*. She had grown difficult, and she had begun "to date."

However, it had been recently decreed that Caroline Crewkerne should come again into vogue. People were to be seen at her Wednesdays who had not been seen there for years.

There was George Betterton for one. And the worldly-wise did not hesitate to account for his presence and even to derive pleasure and profit therefrom. Cheriton and he were both popular men; and about the third week in May two to one against George and three to one against Cheriton were taken and offered.

"Cheriton has the better ringcraft," said students of form, "but Gobo, of course, has a punch in his Garter."

"I assure you, my dear," said a decidedly influential section of the public, "the creature is a perfect simpleton. I assure you she couldn't say 'Bo!' to a goose. It is inconceivable that two men in their position should make themselves so supremely ridiculous. And both of them old enough to be her grandfather."

“Caroline Crewkerne is behind it all,” said the philosophers. “That is a very clever old woman. But how odious it is that she should egg them on to make such an exhibition of themselves.”

All the same, the exhibition was enjoyed hugely. And when the *Morning Post* announced that on a certain evening the Countess of Crewkerne would give a dance for her niece Miss Perry there was a widespread desire to receive an invitation.

Invitations were liberally dispensed, but when they came to hand there were many who were fain to consider that a fly had crept into the ointment. “Fancy dress” was written at the top in a style of caligraphy not unworthy of Miss Pinkerton’s academy for young ladies. Miss Burden had been commanded to do so at the eleventh hour.

“The man Cheriton is responsible for this,” complained those who desired neither the expense nor the inconvenience of habiting themselves in the garb of their ancestors, “because he has a leg—of sorts!”

That may have been partly the reason; but in justice to Cheriton it may be right to observe that, unless he had found a weightier pretext, Caroline Crewkerne would never have assented to any such condition. Indeed, it was only after high argument between them that Cheriton managed to get his way.

“You must always be flamboyant and theatrical,” grunted Caroline. “All the world knows you think you look well in breeches.”

“But I protest, my dear Caroline, it is merely one’s desire to put another plume in your helmet. As Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, the creature will set the town on fire. Pelissier is coming this afternoon to make a faithful copy of the picture.”

“It has been copied once already.”

"Ah, no! It supplied an idea or two merely. When you see it in every detail, precisely as Gainsborough saw it, you will observe the difference."

"People must be as sick of the picture as I am by this time."

"Nonsense! They are only just beginning to realize that you've got a picture."

Cheriton, however, may have had a still deeper motive for his insistence on this eccentric course. When the cards of invitation had been duly issued he rather let the cat out of the bag.

"Of course, Caroline," said he, "you would be obstinate and have your own way about that fellow George Betterton, but you know as well as I do that in any kind of fancy clothes he looks like a boa constrictor."

At first Cheriton professed himself unable to decide whether he should appear as Charles II, or as John Wesley. In the end, however, he decided in favor of the former. Miss Burden had not been so excited for years. For a whole week after the momentous decision was taken the subject filled her thoughts. One day at luncheon she submitted to my lord a problem of peculiar difficulty.

"Not a problem at all, to my mind. Simplest thing in the world, my dear lady. There is only one possible character you can go as."

"I had been thinking of Mary Queen of Scots," said Miss Burden, hardly daring to hope that Lord Cheriton would give his sanction.

"Mary Queen of who?" snarled Caroline.

"No, my dear Miss Burden," said the eminent authority, "the only possible person you can go as is Katherine of Aragon."

"Cheriton, that is ridiculous," said Caroline flatly. "I shall not allow Miss Burden to appear in any such



character. A Jane Austen spinster will be far more appropriate and far less expensive."

"My dear Caroline, do you wish Miss Burden to forfeit entirely her natural distinction?"

Miss Burden blushed most becomingly at his lordship's remark. She looked almost as startled as a fawn. Cheriton had never seen her display so much color as when he made her a little bow to attest his *bona fides*. It was rather a pity, all the same, that his smile unconsciously resembled that of a satyr.

"It is twenty-five minutes past two, Lord Cheriton," announced Miss Perry, putting a large sugarplum in her mouth, "and you have promised to take me to the circus."

"Cheriton," said Caroline, "I forbid your doing anything of the kind. To spend three afternoons a week at a circus is outrageous."

"They are so educational," said Cheriton. "Develop the mind. Show how intelligence can be inculcated into the most unlikely things. Horses good at arithmetic, dogs playing whist, cats indulging in spiritualism. Very educational indeed. Clown imitating monkey in lifelike manner. Illustration of the origin of species. One more sugarplum, my dear Miss Araminta, and then Marchbanks will summon one of these wonderful new automobiles, if possible, with a *tonneau* painted pink."

"Gobo is going to take me to the Horse Show tomorrow," Miss Perry announced.

"Who, pray, is Gobo?" demanded in one breath Aunt Caroline and Lord Cheriton.

"He asked me to call him Gobo," said Miss Perry, helping herself calmly to sugarplums, "and I asked him to call me Goose."

Cheriton's countenance was a study. The same might be said of Aunt Caroline's.

"My dear young lady," said Cheriton, "this really can-

not be. One of the most dangerous men in London. Upon my word, Caroline, you must forbid that old ruffian the house. As for the Horse Show, it is clearly out of the question."

"I promised Gobo," said Miss Perry, "and I don't like to break a promise—do you?"

"My dear young lady, aren't you a little new to the world to make a promise, let alone to keep one! I speak as I feel sure your papa would do were he in my place, and as I know I should do were I in the place of your papa. Your Aunt Caroline is quite of that opinion; I speak for her also. You must not call that man Gobo, he must not call you Goose; and as for the Horse Show, it is out of the question."

"But everybody calls me Goose," said Miss Perry, "because I am rather a silly."

"Caroline," said Cheriton with much gravity, "if you will take the advice of your oldest friend you will forbid that man the house. My dear Miss Araminta, let us try to obliterate a very disagreeable impression by spending a quietly educational afternoon at the circus."

When on the morning of the great day of the fancy dress ball Miss Perry entered the presence of Jim Lascelles as the faithful embodiment, down to the minutest particular, of Gainsborough's masterpiece, that hard-working young painter was seized with despair. It took the form of a gasp.

"Goose Girl," said he, "I shall have to give up coming here. I paint you all the morning, I think of you all the afternoon and evening, and I dream of you all night. You know you have rather knocked a hole in my little world."

"There will be ices to-night," said Miss Perry. "Lord Cheriton almost thinks pink ices are nicest."

"Confound Lord Cheriton!" Jim spoke with unpar-

donable bluntness. "Confound pink ices! Confound you!"

"I thought I would just put on my new frock to see if you think it is as nice as my lilac one."

"I have no thoughts at all this morning, about your new frock or about anything in the wide world. My wretched brain goes round and round, and what do you suppose it is because of?"

"I don't know, Jim," said Miss Perry.

"It is because of you. Look at that canvas you've ruined. Yellow hair—Gainsborough hat—lilac frock—full-fledged cream bun appearance. You will lose me my commission, which means a cool hundred pounds out of my pocket, and my unfortunate mother has denied herself the common necessaries of life to pay for my education. Goose Girl," Jim concluded a little hoarsely, "I am growing afraid of you. You are a sorceress. Something tells me that you will be my ruin."

"I wish you had seen Muffin's mauve," said Miss Perry, who showed very little concern for Jim's ruin.

"I have not the least desire to see Muffin's mauve. In fact, I thank the God who looks after poor painters—if there is such a deity, which I take leave to doubt—that I have not seen it. But I propose to ask you this question: What right have you, Goose Girl, to grow so extravagantly perfect, to get yourself up in this preposterous but entrancing manner, and then to come asking a poor wight of a painting chap, who is daubing away for dear bread and butter, whether he thinks your new frock is as nice as the lilac was?"

"Muffin's mauve—" said Miss Perry.

"Answer me," said Jim sternly. "You can't. You are a sorceress, a weaver of spells. Well, it so happens that I am susceptible to them. I am going to take a decisive step. Goose Girl, I am going to kiss you."

Without more ado Jim Lascelles advanced upon Miss Perry with extended arms and eyes of menace. He hugged her literally, new frock and all, in the open light of the morning; and further, he gave her one of the most resounding kisses that was ever heard in that dignified apartment.

"Get rid of that if you are able to," said he brazenly. "And now sit there as good as pie, while I put that new gown upon canvas."

Miss Perry did as she was told in a manner which implied that she approved decidedly of the whole proceedings.

"Goose Girl," said Jim, attacking the canvas, "you will either make me or mar me. Sometimes I feel it might be the former, but more often I am convinced it will be the latter."

"Muffin's mauve cost a lot of money," said Miss Perry.

"Paws down," said Jim. "The question now for gods and men is, can that hair and that frock live together?"

Jim took up a little looking-glass and turned his back upon the canvas. He gave a sigh of relief.

"Yes, they can by a miracle. And yet they out-Gillet Gillet."

"What will you be to-night, Jim?" asked Miss Perry.

"Achilles, sulking in my tent."

"Where will you put your tent? One can't dance in a tent. And what will you do when you are sulky?"

"Gnash my teeth and curse my luck."

"I will dance with you twice if you would like me to."

"Very charming of you. But I shall not be there."

"Not be there, Jim!" There was no mistaking Miss Perry's consternation.

"Aunt Caroline has not asked me."

It was some little solace to Jim Lascelles that incredulity

and dismay contended upon the usually calm and unruffled countenance of Miss Perry.

“Miss Burden has forgotten you. I must speak to her.”

Miss Perry rose for that purpose.

“Sit down, you Goose,” Jim commanded her. “Don’t mention it to any one unless you want me to get sacked from the house. I am here on sufferance, a poor painting chap, copying a picture to earn bread and cheese; and this ball to-night is being given by the Countess of Crewkerne, for her niece Miss Perry.”

“But, Jim——”

“Goose Girl, keep Mouth Piece immovable. Move not the Chin Piece, the Young Man said. Think of cream buns.”

“But, Jim——” said Miss Perry.

## CHAPTER XIII

### HIGH REVEL IS HELD IN HILL STREET

ALL the same, Miss Perry did not dance with Jim Lascelles that evening. For Jim accompanied his mother to the Theater Royal at Laxton, to witness a performance of that admired old-world comedy, *She Stoops to Conquer*.

He did not appear to enjoy it much. He hardly laughed once, and his mother remarked it.

"What is the matter, my son?" said she. Jim's mother looked absurdly young to occupy the maternal relation to such a great hulking fellow.

"There is a ridiculous girl in my head," said he, "who is above me in station."

"That Goose," said Jim's mother, a little contemptuously it is to be feared.

"Yes, my dear. She is turning my brain rather badly."

Mrs. Lascelles was amused that her son should be so serious.

"If only I had money enough to buy back the Red House at Widdiford," sighed Jim, "I believe I could cut out them all."

"She was never able to resist the orchard and the south wall and the strawberry beds," Mrs. Lascelles agreed.

"I never saw such a creature. Those lilac frocks and those Gainsborough hats are maddening."

"Well, my son, you must paint her portrait and make her and yourself famous."

"She is famous already, worse luck. She is a nine

days' wonder in Mayfair and certain to marry a duke."

"That Goose!"

"It sounds absurd. But as the old French johnny says, 'Nothing is so absurd as the truth.'"

"Well, my son," said Jim's mother, who believed profoundly in his star, "just paint her and see what comes of it."

While Jim Lascelles lay that night with his head on his arm, dreaming of the Goose Girl, high revel was held in Hill Street, Mayfair. All ages and both sexes were gathered in the garb of their ancestors in the spacious suite of rooms on the first floor. From the moment the first seductive strains were put forth by Herr Blaum's Green Viennese Band, and his Excellency the Illyrian Ambassador, in the guise of Henry Quatre or the Duke of Buckingham—nobody was quite sure which—accompanied by Diana of Ephesus, a bread and butter miss who looked much too young to be a duchess, went up the carpetless blue drawing-room, which seemed at least three times the size of ordinary occasions, as indeed was the case, there was no doubt that Caroline Crewkerne was going to have a great success.

It may be that Red Cross Knights, Cardinal Richelieu, Catherines de' Medici and those kinds of people are not easily susceptible of thrills; but there was one unmistakably when George Betterton, in the character of a Gentleman of the Georgian Era, took the floor with Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, by Gainsborough, upon his arm.

The less responsible spirits directed their gaze to Charles II. The Merry Monarch was engaged in amiable converse with his hostess. Arrayed in an Indian shawl, the gift of her Sovereign and a jeweled turban bestowed upon her by the Shah of Persia during his last visit to this country, together with the insignia of the Spotted

Parrot duly displayed round her neck, she was in the opinion of many a very tolerable representation of a heathen deity. As a Gentleman of the Georgian Era and Gainsborough's Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, came down the room in a somewhat inharmonious manner, owing to the decidedly original views of the former in regard to the art he was practicing, the musical voice of Charles II rose lightly above the strains of the waltz and the *frou-frou* of the dancers.

"Yes," said the monarch, "the Georgian Era is sufficiently obvious; but can anybody tell me what has happened to the Gentleman?"

The Georgian Era went its victorious way, however, gobbling decidedly, perspiring freely, holding Gainsborough's Duchess in a grip of iron, and slowly but surely trampling down all opposition with the greatest determination. When, with coxcomb ensanguined, but with a solemn gobble of triumph, he returned whence he started, a slight but well-defined murmur of applause was to be heard on every hand.

"Georgian Era wins in a canter," one of the knowing could be heard to proclaim. "Evens Gobo against the field."

"Duchess," said the Georgian Era with a bow to his fair partner, who looked as cool as a cucumber, "you must have an ice."

"Yes," said Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, promptly, "a pink one, please."

Said the Second Charles: "Bad form. Decidedly a breach of manners to address her as duchess in the circumstances. But what can one expect of the Georgian Era!"

The Merry Monarch, with the unmistakable air of the master of the ceremonies, as indeed he was, proceeded to lead forth Katharine of Aragon, who was seen to great



advantage, such was her natural distinction, and who was that ill-fated queen to the manner born.

“Humph!” said the Heathen Deity. “For a born fool she dances very well.”

The Second Charles danced like a rather elderly angel with wings.

As for the young people, all enjoyed themselves hugely. Eligible young men, and not a single one of the other kind had gained admittance, had each his dance with the fair Araminta, or the fair Daphne, or the fair Evadne, or the fair Nell of Old Drury. Of course, Gainsborough’s masterpiece really brooked no rival, except the great canvas in the left-hand corner, which in the full glare of the electric light seemed to dispute the supremacy of its youthful descendant.

“Yellow hair knocks spots off the auburn,” said an Eldest Son to a lynx-eyed lady to whose apron strings he was resolutely tied.

“A matter of taste,” was the rejoinder. “Yellow is not a *safe* color. It is well known that it means doubtful antecedents. Go, Pet, and find Mary.”

Pet, who was six-feet-four and had leave from Knightsbridge Barracks until 5.0 A. M., claimed the Watteau Shepherdess, a live little piece of Dresden China, who had forty-six thousand in land and thirty-six thousand in Consols, and would have more when Uncle William permanently retired from the Cavalry; and who was perfectly willing to marry Pet or any one else if her mamma only gave her permission to do so.

Charles II sat out the supper dance with the fair Araminta.

“Miss Goose,” said that sagacious monarch, “never dance the dance before supper if you can possibly avoid it. You will live longer, you will be able to do ampler justice to the menu, you will also be able to get in before

the squash; and if the quails run short, as is sometimes the case, it won't matter so much as it otherwise might have."

As far as the Merry Monarch was concerned, however, the precautions against the squash and the possibility of the quails running short were wholly superfluous. The pleasantest corner of the best-situated table had been reserved for him days before, and his favorite delicacies had been duly earmarked.

"Miss Goose," said the Merry Monarch, "have you had an ice yet?"

"I have had seven," said Araminta, Duchess of Dorset.

"Pink ones?" asked the Second Charles.

"Five were pink," said the Duchess, "one was yellow, and one was green. But I think that pink ones are almost the nicest."

"I concur," said the Second Charles.

After supper, before dancing was resumed, some incautious person, after gazing upon Gainsborough's masterpiece, and subjecting it to some admiring if unlearned remarks, pulled aside the curtain which hid from view Jim Lascelles' half-finished copy.

"Oho!" proclaimed the incautious one in a loud voice, "what have we here? Evidently a Sargent in the making! Only Sargent could paint that hair."

The attention of others was attracted.

"One would say a Whistler," said a second critic.

"A Sargent decidedly," said a third. "Only he could paint that hair."

"High art, I dare say," remarked a fourth, "but isn't it a bit far-fetched?"

"If Gillet were in London," said critic the fifth, who had more instruction than all the others together, "I should say it was Gillet. As he is not, it may be described as the work of a not unskillful disciple."

Cheriton stood listening.

"It is the work of a young chap named Lascelles," said he; "the coming man, I'm told."

Nobody had told Cheriton that Jim Lascelles was the coming man, and there was small reason enough to believe that he was; but my lord was a member of that useful and considerable body which derives a kind of factitious importance from the making of imposing statements. It seemed to react upon his own status to announce that a young chap named Lascelles was the coming man when not a soul had heard of the young chap in question.

"I must remember the name," said a broad-jowled marquis from Yorkshire, who had come up in time to hear Cheriton's statement, and who greatly preferred to accept the judgment of others in the fine arts rather than exercise his own. "I should like him to paint Priscilla."

"The very man to paint Priscilla," said Cheriton with conviction. And this must stand to the credit side of his account, for it was genuine good nature.

"What is the subject?" said the first critic.

"Can't you see?" said a chorus. "It is Caroline Crewkerne's Gainsborough."

"Which of 'em?"

"The yellow-haired one, of course."

Cheriton screwed a glass into his eye. He had been the first to detect that the color of the hair was yellow, and yet for some occult reason the solution of the mystery had not until that moment revealed itself to him.

"What damned impertinence!" said he.

"Anybody been treading on your toes, Cheriton?" asked several persons.

"Do you know, I commissioned that fellow Lascelles to make a copy of Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, for Cheriton House."

“And he copies the wrong Araminta!” came a shout of laughter. There was really no need to shout, but immediately after supper that is the sort of thing that happens sometimes. “A good judge too.”

“Gross impertinence! I think I shall be quite justified in repudiating the whole transaction.”

“Quite, Cheriton,” said the marquis, with a very obvious wink at the company and preparing to jest in the somewhat formidable Yorkshire manner. “But it is easily explained. Young fellow got a trifle mixed between Gainsborough’s Araminta, Duchess of Dorset, and Nature’s Araminta, Duchess of Brancaster. Very natural mistake—what?”

The arrival upon the scene of the Georgian Era and the Heathen Deity, the latter walking quite nimbly with very little aid from her stick, set the circle of art critics in further uproar.

“Who pulled aside the curtain?” demanded the mistress of the house. “Cheriton, I suspect you.”

“Anyhow, it is my picture,” said Cheriton coolly, although he felt the game was rather going against him.

“It is not at all clear to my mind that it is your picture,” said the sharp-witted Caroline to the delight of everybody. “You send a man to copy my Gainsborough, and he copies my niece.”

“A very natural error,” said the marquis, “as we have just explained to Cheriton.”

The Georgian Era was seen to grow uneasy. He began to fumble in the costume of his ancestors. Obviously he was not quite sure where the pockets were. At last, however, he was able to produce a pair of spectacles, which he proceeded to adjust.

“Very good likeness,” he said heavily. “Caroline, when the picture is finished I should like to purchase it for the Cheadle Collection.”

A salvo of derision greeted this speech, but the speaker was constitutionally impervious.

"The picture is not Caroline's, my dear George," said Cheriton. "It is being painted on my commission."

"Excellent likeness," said George tenaciously. "I shall make you a fair offer, Cheriton, for the Cheadle Collection."

"I am sorry, my dear George, for the sake of the Cheadle Collection," was the amiable rejoinder, "but that picture is not for sale."

"You are quite right, Cheriton," said Caroline Crewkerne, "the picture is not for sale. I gave permission for a copy to be made of my Gainsborough, not of my niece."

"It appears to be a question of copyright," said an aspirant to wit.

"I hold the copyright in both at present," said Caroline in an exceedingly grim manner.

The strains of the dance began to float through the room. The younger section of the company had set to partners again; a brace of royalties had arrived, yet in spite of that fact jest and counter-jest were in the air.

"Cheriton was never in the hunt from the start," said the Yorkshire marquis, "if you want my candid opinion."

"The luckier he," said the first critic. "What does any man want with a girl who hasn't a sou, a country parson's daughter?"

"Upstanding creature," said critic the second. "Comes of a good stock on the distaff side."

"Ye-es," said a third. "Useful."

"Finest-looking girl in England," said a fourth.

"They can both afford to marry her," said the marquis, "and I will lay the odds that the better man does."

"Cheriton gets her in that event."

"Gobo for a monkey."

All the time, however, in Another Place, the Master of the Revels—but to anticipate may be to spoil the story.

## CHAPTER XIV

### UNGENTLEMANLIKE BEHAVIOR OF JIM LASCELLES

**J**IM LASCELLES continued his task. Each morning at ten o'clock he arrived at Hill Street and worked with diligence until 2.0 P. M. Urged by the forces within him, and sustained by the injudicious counsel of his mother, he devoted his powers to the yellow hair, in spite of the fact that it was his bounden duty to copy the auburn.

On the third morning following the dance Jim's labors were interrupted by Lord Cheriton. Jim was feeling rather depressed. For one thing his conscience smote him. He had deliberately risked a sum of money which he could not afford to lose; and further, it was most likely that he was about to offer an affront to his only patron. The more work he put into the picture the more marked became the difference between it and the original. Again, and this perhaps was an equally solid reason for his depression, this morning the Goose Girl had forsaken him. She had gone for a ride in the park with her duke.

Doubtless Cheriton was sharing Jim's depression. At least, when he entered the drawing-room to inspect the labors of his *protégé*, a countenance which, as a general rule, made a point of exhibiting a scrupulous amiability, was clouded over.

Cheriton's scrutiny of Jim's labors was long and particular.

"I invite you to be frank with me, Lascelles," said he. "Is this a copy of the Dorset or is it a portrait of a living person?"

By nature Jim was simple to the verge of the ingenuous. But really, his predicament was so awkward that he did not know what answer to make.

"Some of it is Gainsborough," he said lamely, "and some of it, I'm afraid, is Nature."

"My friend," said Cheriton judicially, "that hardly seems a plain answer to a straightforward question."

Jim agreed. Suddenly his jaw dropped and he burst into a queer laugh. "The fact is, sir, I am in a fix."

Cheriton regarded the young man in a highly critical manner.

"Yes, Lascelles," he said slowly, "I think you are."

"A regular fix," said Jim with emphasis, as if he desired to gain confidence from a frank statement of his trouble.

His face seemed to ask for a little sympathy, but not a suggestion of it was forthcoming.

"What can a fellow do?" said Jim desperately. "She will come and sit here on that sofa in a better light than the duchess. The sun of the morning will shine upon her; and when Nature comes to handle pink and white and blue and yellow she has a greater magic than even Gainsborough had."

Cheriton shook his head with magisterial severity.

"My friend," said he, "you have a very weak case. And I feel bound to say that the manner in which you present it does not, in my opinion, make it stronger."

"I expect not," was the rueful reply. "But dash it all, what is a fellow to do if she will come and sit on that sofa and pose like Romney's Emma?"

"His duty, to my mind, is absolutely clear, and I think it is simple. He should order the intruder out of the room."

"Oh, yes, I know that is what a really strong man would do." Jim gave a groan. "I know that is what

a Velasquez or a Rembrandt would have done. And he would have cursed her like fury for sitting there at all."

"Yes, I think so," said the mellifluous Cheriton, "Rembrandt especially. In my opinion Rembrandt would have shaken his fist at her."

"That is the worst of being a mediocrity. It takes a chap of enormous character to do these things."

"I am afraid, Lascelles, the plea of mediocrity will do nothing for you. If anything, it weakens your case. You must either plead consummate genius or nothing."

"I am not such a fool as to believe that I'm a genius," said the young man with admirable frankness.

"I am not such a fool as to believe you are either," said Cheriton with a frankness that was equally admirable. "And therefore, examining your conduct with all the leniency the circumstances will permit, I am unable to find any excuse for it. I fear my old friend Lady Crewkerne is much annoyed—forgive my plainness, Lascelles, but I feel it to be necessary—by your intrepidity in copying her niece instead of her Gainsborough; and I, in the circumstances, cannot help sharing her disapproval."

"Rub it in, Lord Cheriton," said Jim. He stuck his hands in his pockets and began to whistle softly.

"Yes, my friend, I intend to do so. In fact, I find it difficult to express myself adequately upon the subject, without saying more than one who was at school with your father might consider it desirable to say to a young man who has his way to make in the world."

"Say just as much as you like, sir. I know I've made an ass of myself. And of course I haven't a leg to stand on, really. And I expect the old cat will carpet me too."

My lord dropped his eyeglass with an air of dignified agitation.



"I beg your pardon, Lascelles. To whom do you refer?"

"To that damned old woman!" said Jim with an air of absolute impenitence.

"Can it be possible that you mean Caroline Crewkerne, my oldest friend?"

"I mean the aunt of Nature's immortal work," said Jim coolly. "I really can't help it; I feel that I must curse somebody this morning. And as she is bound to curse me, I don't see why I shouldn't return the compliment."

"Your habit of explanation, Lascelles, is decidedly unfortunate."

"Well, let me know the worst, Lord Cheriton. I suppose you withdraw your offer, and I am to be bundled out neck and crop with my canvas and forbidden to come here again?"

"I certainly withdraw my offer. In regard to prohibition of the house, that, of course, rests entirely with my old friend, of whom you have spoken in a singularly disrespectful—and shall I say ungentlemanlike?—manner."

"I couldn't help it," said Jim humbly. "It has done me good to say it. But of course, I'm in the wrong altogether."

"You are, undoubtedly. To my mind, you are more in the wrong than one could have expected a young man of your antecedents, upbringing and general attainment to be."

"If a confounded girl will make a habit of coming into this room continually to ask your opinion of her hat and her frock and whether you have ever tasted cream buns and pink ices and whether you think Muffin's mauve was as nice as her lilac is——"

"My dear Lascelles," interrupted Cheriton, "your

habit of explanation is really most unfortunate.”

“Well, kick me out, sir, and my canvas too,” said Jim desperately, “and have done with it.”

Jim Lascelles, rash fellow that he was, feeling himself forever disgraced, and that he had forfeited the respect of his only patron, proceeded to pack up his gear.

“I’m afraid this half finished canvas presents a difficulty.”

“You have repudiated it, haven’t you?” said Jim rather fiercely.

“Unquestionably as a copy of the Dorset. But all the same, it can hardly be permitted to leave this house.”

“Why not, Lord Cheriton?”

“It is an unauthorized portrait of my ward, Miss Perry, who is still *in statu pupillari*.”

Jim allowed that such was the case. “But it’s rather hard on a fellow. I’ve put a lot of work into that picture.”

“I can see you have, Lascelles.”

“And, of course,” said Jim injudiciously, “I should like to put a lot more work into it. It is such a fine subject.”

“The subject is much too fine, if I may venture an opinion. My advice is, burn the canvas and forget that it ever existed.”

“Burn it!” cried Jim aghast.

“I am afraid if you don’t Lady Crewkerne will.”

“But she has no right——” said Jim fiercely.

“Her right, my dear fellow, is hardly to be contested. I am afraid we shall find that this half finished canvas is her property.”

“In that case,” said Jim, apprehensive but defiant, “I shall remove it at once to my studio.”

Cheriton had dropped his bomb. The gyrations of his

victim, whom he had fully alarmed, seemed to afford him a cynical pleasure.

"It would be indeed a crime, I grant you," he said, "to destroy such an extremely promising work of art. Let us seek an alternative."

"The only alternative is that I should remove it at once."

"In its half finished state? That would be a pity."

"It shall not be burned if I can possibly help it," said Jim.

During the pause which followed the young man seemed to be disconcerted more than a little.

"I have a suggestion to make to you, Lascelles," said his patron. "In the circumstances I think it is quite the most you can hope for."

"Whatever it may be, Lord Cheriton, I shall be happy to consider it," said Jim with a rueful smile.

"In the first place, it seems to me that the best thing I can do is to get Lady Crewkerne's permission for you to complete the portrait of her niece. Now, I warn you it may not be easy. As I think you realize, she is a difficult member of a difficult sex. But I am only prepared to do this upon one condition."

Jim asked dismally what the condition was.

"It is this, Lascelles." Cheriton's air suddenly grew very businesslike. "If I can obtain permission—and the 'if' is a big one—for you to finish your portrait of Miss Perry I must be allowed to purchase it upon my own terms."

"Yes," said Jim, "that is only fair."

It began to seem that things were taking a course more favorable than he could have hoped.

"Assuming I can obtain permission, and you finish the picture in the manner in which you have begun, it will be a pleasure to hang it at Cheriton House."

Jim Lascelles was touched by the kindness of his patron.

“Lord Cheriton,” he said with admirable simplicity, “may I offer you an apology for my rotten behavior. And I hope you’ll accept it, because you’ve been so kind to me—much kinder than you ought to have been really.”

“Yes, Lascelles,” said the judicial Cheriton, “I am inclined to take that view myself. But your father was good to me at school; and you are young, and you have talent, and you have a rare subject to engage it, and I cannot help feeling that it would be a pity if you lost the opportunity which, in a sense, you have had the vision to create. Mind, Lascelles, I don’t excuse you in the least. Take your conduct all around it has been abominable, but in my humble judgment, had it been more correct, I personally should not hold such a hopeful view of your future. For you have conformed to my fixed belief that all the men who are worth anything begin by breaking the rules. But when it comes to the breaking of rules, pray remember how easy it is to get expelled from the school. And should that happen—well, of course, you are done for unless you are able to found a school of your own.”

Jim Lascelles forbore to smile at this piece of didacticism. He was full of gratitude. The old “perisher” had behaved so much more nicely than he need have done.

“If only I had genius,” sighed Jim, “I would give my days to the fashioning of the most absolute masterpiece that ever adorned the walls of Cheriton House.”

“You remember Carlyle’s definition?” said the owner of Cheriton House.

“Carlyle was a blatant old donkey.”

“That was always my opinion. And I once had the privilege of telling him so, and, what is more, the noisy

fellow admitted it. Doubtless what he meant to express by his definition was the fact that Genius is perfect submission to the Idea."

"Well, here goes for perfect submission to the Idea," said Jim.

He took up his brush and his palette and gave a very deft touch to the garments of Miss Perry.

In almost the same moment a very ludicrous drawl assailed his ear. "Do you like my new riding habit?" Miss Perry herself had entered the room.

Jim Lascelles made a gesture of despair. He kept his back turned resolutely upon the new riding habit.

"Dear me!" said Cheriton, "Artemis."

"Do you know," said Miss Perry, whose voice had a thrill in it, "in Rotten Row I nearly knocked a policeman over."

"Figuratively, I hope," said my lord.

Without a doubt Miss Perry in her new riding habit looked positively annihilating. Lord Cheriton was certainly of that opinion. As for Jim Lascelles, he waved her away from him with great energy.

"That's the sort of thing," he said, making a tacit appeal for protection and sympathy.

"Miss Goose," said my lord, "Mr. Lascelles has made a very serious indictment against you."

"Has he?" Miss Perry opened very large, very round, and very blue eyes upon Jim.

"Mr. Lascelles complains," said my lord with paternal severity, "that while he is assiduously engaged in copying the famous portrait of your great-grandmamma, you persist in coming into this room in your smartest gowns, in sitting in the middle of the sofa, in absorbing the best light, in posing in a manner that no really sensitive painter can possibly resist, with the melancholy result that you literally force him to paint you instead of your great-

grandmamma, quite, as he assures me, against his inclination and his judgment."

"Oh, but I don't mind at all," said Miss Perry with great friendliness. "It made me rather tired at first holding my chin like this, but at the end of an hour I always get a cream bun."

"At the end of an hour you always get a cream bun! Do you indeed?"

"Yes," said Miss Perry, "small ones, but they are almost as nice as the large ones, I think."

Lord Cheriton was dumbfounded.

"Well, what can a fellow do?" said Jim desperately. "What with the sun stuck up there, southeast by south, and this pink and white and blue and yellow arrangement on the sofa yonder. As for the chin—well, if a chin will curve like that it must take the consequences."

Cheriton was aghast.

"Say as little as possible, Lascelles, I entreat you. Your case is hopeless. But I am bound to own, since we have had this astounding revelation of the cream buns, without going further into the matter, which one naturally shrinks from doing, I must say your future as a painter seems brighter than ever."

"Thank you, Lord Cheriton," said Jim modestly.

"But in regard to your future as a mere unit of society one prefers to remain silent."

Jim Lascelles turned his gaze upon Miss Perry. It was of such a singular truculence that it fairly hypnotized that irresponsible into a semblance of discretion.

"If you will go and put on that new frock," he said in a manner perilously akin to effrontery, "we can get in an hour before luncheon, and then to-morrow you will start a cream bun in hand."

The prospect seemed greatly to the mind of Miss Perry.

"That will be so awfully nice."

She left the room with great cheerfulness.

Cheriton regarded Jim Lascelles with the fatherly air he was apt to assume towards the world in general.

"I shall have to revise my estimate of your attainments," said he. "It is becoming increasingly clear to my mind that you may go far."

"Gillet said that if I applied myself I might one day be able to paint a portrait."

"Gillet's opinion is valuable," said my lord with the air of one who sets a higher value upon his own. He examined Jim's work very critically. "By Jove," he said, "you have had the wit to find a subject. Let us live in hope that the artist will prove worthy of it."

Jim beamed with pleasure. After all, he had the latent ambition of every honest craftsman.

"My friend, may I give you a word of advice?"

Jim showed himself becomingly gratified at the prospect of receiving it.

"It is this," said his patron impressively. "You must acquire the habit of charging more for your pictures."

Jim hoped to be able to do so. But times were hard, and it was uphill work making a reputation.

"One appreciates that. But I heard you spoken of as the coming man the other night."

"If only I had a little more talent," sighed Jim.

"If only you had a little more faith in it, Lascelles. It is faith that is so necessary."

"All the same, sir, I wish the fairies had been a little kinder."

"Surely they have been sufficiently kind to the man who could pose that head and put that hair upon canvas. But what I wanted particularly to say to you is this. My friend Kendal intends asking you to paint a portrait of his girl Priscilla."

Jim was thrilled.

"That is awfully good of him," said he, "and awfully good of you, Lord Cheriton."

"Perhaps I have the better title to your gratitude, because as far as Kendal is concerned he is one of those sluggish fellows who always prefers to take some one else's opinion rather than form one of his own. I told him you were the man to paint Priscilla, and he was quite ready to take my word for it. And I am by no means sure you are not."

Jim Lascelles could not help feeling that he did not deserve such kindness. "I wish now," said he, "I hadn't behaved so rottenly."

"Behave well to Kendal," said the magnanimous Cheriton. "That is the really important matter. Paint his girl Priscilla to the best of your ability, and be careful to charge him five hundred guineas."

Jim was staggered.

"Five hundred guineas. Why, he will never pay it. He could get an absolute first-rater for that sum."

Cheriton sagaciously smiled.

"No doubt he could. And if Kendal pays five hundred guineas he will consider he's got one. When I come to look at your *chef-d'œuvre* on the wall of his gloomy and draughty dining room in Yorkshire I shall say, 'Kendal, that portrait of Priscilla appears to be an uncommonly sound piece of work.' And he will say as proud as you please, 'I should think it was my dear fellow. That young chap Lascelles turned out absolutely first-rate. He charged five hundred guineas for that picture. I am telling everybody.'"

Jim Lascelles seemed to be a little troubled by his good fortune. "I hope it is quite fair to Lord Kendal to charge him five hundred guineas for a portrait one would be only too glad to paint for fifty."

Cheriton was amused by this *naïveté*.



“Simplicity is much to be desired in art,” said he, “but it is well not to take it into the market place. There is the man with whom one is doing business to consider. If Kendal pays fifty guineas for the portrait of Priscilla he will think exactly ten times less of it than if he pays five hundred; and instead of hanging it in his dining room in the worst possible light, he will hang it in one of the smaller bedrooms in a very much better one.”

At this point Cheriton’s homily was interrupted by the return of Miss Perry. In her Gainsborough gown which she had worn at the fancy dress ball and in her wonderful hat, which by some miracle had been clapped on at just the right angle, she looked more distracting than any human creature ought really to do. Seating herself in the middle of the sofa with great composure, she tilted her chin to the light of the morning and folded her hands in her lap with almost the air of a professional.

“Out for blood,” said Jim approvingly.

“Lascelles,” said my lord, “I am almost afraid this means a large one.”

“Such zeal to serve the arts,” Jim agreed, “really deserves encouragement.”

“If Gunter is sincerely interested in art, as one feels sure he must be, perhaps he will make a reduction upon the large ones if you contract for a quantity.”

Jim was delighted with the pose and worked very happily. He was in high spirits. Owing to his patron’s generosity he had got out of his scrape far more easily than was to have been expected. Moreover, his prospects had taken a sudden and remarkable turn for the better. And, these considerations apart, his subject fired him. At work in this precious hour he felt that his execution had never had such boldness, freedom and authenticity.

Cheriton watched his *protégé* with approval. As a critic he was sufficiently accomplished to detect rare pos-

sibilities in Jim's method. Here might be a *trouvaille*, if only the young fellow had thoroughness as well as courage.

Miss Perry had not moved her chin once for nearly an hour, so that her guerdon was as good as won; Jim Lascelles had yielded for the same period to a genuine inspiration; and Cheriton sat at ease regarding with real satisfaction the choice fruits that were springing from his liberal treatment of the artistic temper, when this harmony of sitter, painter and patron was gravely imperiled by the entrance of a small round dog. As usual, he heralded the approach of an old woman and an ebony walking stick.

As soon as Lady Crewkerne entered the blue drawing-room she was stricken with speechless amazement. Jim Lascelles continued to ply his brush in blissful ignorance of her arrival; Miss Perry, for political reasons, was careful to pay it no attention; Cheriton, however, raised a solemn forefinger. Signs were soon forthcoming, however, that the mistress of the house was about to disregard this warning.

"Ssssh, Caroline!"

"What, pray, is the meaning of this?" demanded Caroline as soon as the power of speech returned to her.

"A most critical stage, believe me," said Cheriton in a voice of honey. "Three minutes more and I shall invite you to speak with freedom."

"Tell me, why is that girl sitting there in the gew-gaws of a play-actress?"

"Ssssh, Caroline! Don't you see?"

The absolute composure of the fair sitter and the fact that she chose to remain deaf, dumb and blind to the intruder seemed to exasperate that autocrat.

"Tell me, girl, what is the meaning of it?" she stormed.

The ebony walking stick descended heavily upon the carpet.

"Move not the Chin Piece, the Young Man said." Jim's lips formed the magic words even if they did not actually utter them.

The filmy, far-away look continued in the eyes of Miss Perry. She paid heed to none.

Cheriton lifted again a solemn forefinger. "Ssssh, Caroline! One brief instant more. The whole situation is most critical."

"Tell me, is the creature hypnotized?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Who gave permission for her to sit for her portrait? In those fal-lals, too."

"Amiable old Dame Nature. I ask you, how could she refuse it?"

"I forbid it. Perfectly disgraceful. It shall not go on."

At this moment Miss Perry ventured to speak. "Large cream bun to-morrow morning, please."

"Dear me," said Jim *sotto voce*. "How time *does* fly. It can't be an hour already!"

"Girl," said Aunt Caroline, "I demand an explanation."

Miss Perry having no explanation to offer, Lord Cheriton came to her aid.

"The truth is," said he in tones of honey, "our distinguished young friend Mr. Lascelles is the victim of a very natural mistake. My idea was, of course, that he should be content to copy your Gainsborough, but since he has put another interpretation upon his mandate who shall blame him?"

Caroline Crewkerne, however, was not one lightly to be appeased. "It is unpardonable that any man should venture to paint clandestinely the portrait of my niece. And in my own house too."

Jim held himself proudly erect and not without disdain. The old woman's tone was certainly provocative.

"Lady Crewkerne," said Jim with an absence of tact which his friend and patron deplored, "I hope the offense is not so grave as it seems. The nature of the subject is my excuse."

The old lady looked Jim over in a decidedly scornful manner. She seemed to be in doubt whether such a person as Jim was entitled to receive a reply from her.

"It depends upon the light in which one views the matter," she said in a voice that trembled with anger. "I have formed my own opinion about such behavior. I must ask you to leave this house immediately, and in future it will be closed to you."

Jim was stung. Such an unbridled display of despotism would have galled the mildest creature alive. Cheriton, who by long association with the Whigs understood their arbitrary temper, was really less shocked by such an uncivil exhibition than he pretended to be. He took Jim Lascelles by the sleeve, drew him aside, and spoke to him like a father.

"Say nothing, my dear fellow. Let her have her head. Then leave her to me."

Jim, however, was furious. He was young and hot-headed; and adversity had made him more sensitive on the score of his dignity than it is quite wise for a man to be. Therefore he was by no means inclined to leave the adjustment of the matter to others. Not by looks alone did he express resentment.

"I am sorry, Lady Crewkerne, you feel like this about it," he said with his head in the air. "But I am very happy to carry out your instructions. A couple of men shall come this afternoon to fetch the canvas."

And then, with an incredible absence of judgment, Jim Lascelles packed up his tools, and distributing curt bows

to everybody, stalked out of the room and out of the house.

Cheriton exhibited genuine concern. Miss Perry looked ready to shed tears. Cream buns apart, she was very fond of Jim.

“Sadly unwise,” said my lord.

“A deplorable exhibition of impudence,” said Caroline Crewkerne. “I shall not give up that canvas. It shall be destroyed.”

“I have grave doubts, Caroline, whether legally it can be done.”

For a man of Cheriton’s vaunted wisdom and experience it was a most injudicious remark.

“You think so?” was the prompt rejoinder. “That decides me. Such persons must be taught a lesson. Have the goodness, Cheriton, to ring the bell.”

Cheriton showed genuine concern.

“Surely, Caroline,” said he, “you cannot mean that you are going to destroy it?”

“That is my intention.”

“Oh, but surely it will be nothing less than a crime.”

“It shall be destroyed,” said Caroline decisively.

“But many hours of fine work have been put into that picture.” Cheriton spoke with great seriousness. “And there is fine thought in it too. To destroy it would be a crime.”

“The man shall be taught manners,” said the implacable Caroline.

“The kettle is always a severe judge of the pot,” mused Cheriton. And then aloud: “Really, Caroline, you began it.”

“The man has painted my niece’s portrait without obtaining my consent. And when remonstrated with he grows insolent.”

“Well, you know, Caroline, that hand of yours is

uncommonly heavy. And although no one deplores the young man's conduct for his own sake more deeply than I, he acted precisely as his rash and hot-headed father would have done in the circumstances."

"I am not in the least interested in such a person or his belongings," said Caroline Crewkerne. "But I have made up my mind that this picture shall be destroyed."

## CHAPTER XV

### DIPLOMACY IS CALLED FOR

**C**HERITON'S gravity was of a kind he seldom displayed.

"Caroline," he said, "If you persist in this course no right-minded person can ever forgive you. The lad is very poor and his history is a sad one. He is the son of Lascelles, V.C., as brave a man as ever lived. His only fault was that he was too open-handed. But for that this young chap would be a man of wealth and position."

"I can hear nothing further upon the subject," said Caroline Crewkerne, who was adamant. "My mind is made up. Cheriton, have the goodness to ring the bell."

The affair must have had a tragic ending there and then had not the god who watches over poor painters seen fit to enact a little providence of his own. At that crucial moment there came to Cheriton's aid no less a person than George Betterton. And as if that opportune arrival was not in itself enough, Providence took the trouble to play a double *coup*. Almost immediately afterwards Marchbanks made the announcement that luncheon was ready.

While Caroline enlarged upon her grievances to his Grace and outlined the extreme course she proposed to follow, Cheriton scribbled hastily in pencil on the back of a card, "Remove immediately half-finished picture from No.—Hill Street, Berkeley Square, to The Acacias, Hawthorn Road, Laxton."

This accomplished, he proceeded to take John into his confidence. He placed the card, together with a sovereign, in the palm of that functionary.

“Go along at once,” said he, “to the people at the Bond Street Galleries and give them this card. They are to remove the half-finished picture in the blue drawing-room to that address. By the time luncheon is over it must be out of the house. Is that clear?”

The answer was in the affirmative.

“See this is done, and when questions are asked all you need know upon the subject is that a couple of men came and took it away. You understand?”

John understood perfectly.

During luncheon Cheriton was seen to particular advantage. At any time but a very little effort enabled him to be one of the most agreeable men in London. To-day he excelled. He was full of new stories and choice fresh gossip; he was very genial to George Betterton, whom he encouraged to discourse at length upon the Militia, and to his hostess he gave a tip for the Oaks, a species of information for which she had a pronounced weakness.

It was seldom among his intimates that George was permitted to mount his hobbyhorse. As for Cheriton, he was the last man in the world, as a rule, to consent to hold the head of that fantastic animal while George established himself firmly in the saddle. But on this occasion he did so in the most graceful manner.

“Excellent speech of yours in the House the other evening, my dear fellow,” he said. “I wasn’t there myself—Philosophical Society Annual Meeting—but you were very carefully reported in *The Times*. Quite your happiest vein, if I may say so. Very sound common sense. You thought so, Caroline, did you not?”

Strange as it may seem, Caroline walked straight into



the trap. With all her rather contemptuous knowledge of mundane affairs, she had one besetting weakness. She attached an absurd importance to any form of politics. It was her Whiggery, no doubt. The most consummate bores were known to flourish in her sight, or upon the slightest pretext her vanity would lead her to believe that her fingers were really in the pie, and that she had a very considerable hand in the destinies of the empire.

In the heyday of her glory it used to be asserted freely by idle persons that if the country was not actually ruled from Hill Street, ministers at least were made and marred there. Governments went in fear and trembling of that quarter, it was said. And it is by no means improbable that Caroline Crewkerne came to believe it. It is surprising what vanity will do for us.

To-day the smoldering embers of a lifelong illusion allowed Caroline Crewkerne to establish George Betterton quite firmly astride his hobbyhorse. Cheriton counted the minutes of this exquisite boredom. George was always heavy. He spoke so slowly and impressively that he could deliver a platitude in a longer space of time than any man living, and he could use fewer words in the process. Indeed, upon the strength of this gift he had won a reputation for incisive brevity.

To see Caroline Crewkerne wagging her vain old ears in an exaggerated attitude of statesmanlike regard was a positive joy to Cheriton, particularly as time was so valuable. All the same, the minutes grew tedious in their passing. The clock chimed half-past two, and Miss Perry mentioned the circus.

“Let us postpone the circus until to-morrow, my dear Miss Goose, if you really don’t mind,” said Cheriton. “The conversation is so absorbing. The preserved ginger is highly delectable too.”

Miss Perry shared the latter opinion.

“Green Chartreuse or Grand Marnier, my lord?”

“Both,” said my lord.

Marchbanks dissembled his surprise in a very expert manner. In his eyes, however, a peer of the realm was in the happy position of being unable to do wrong.

It was not, however, that Cheriton indulged in both these luxuries. But observing that George Betterton chose Green Chartreuse he contrived to smuggle the Grand Marnier also to George’s side of the table. He then addressed himself to slumber. Twenty minutes later he awoke with a little start.

“Beg pardon, George,” said he. “Did I understand you to say the Militia had gone to the dooce and the Country must be reconstructed, or that the Country had gone to the dooce and the Militia must be reconstructed?”

“The Country, Cheriton,” said his hostess in her most *affairé* tones; “certainly the Country.”

“What a good head you have, Caroline! Take after your father. Sorry to interrupt you, George. Most able discourse. By the way, Caroline, we never have the treat of the famous Waterloo brandy these days. Not for myself. I never drink brandy; but I was thinking of George. It is known to be excellent for any kind of disquisition.”

George Betterton, duly fortified with the Waterloo brandy, proceeded on his victorious way.

“Country gone to the dogs—yes,” said Cheriton. “Militia gone to the dooce—quite so. Circus to-morrow, Miss Goose. But Gobo quite educational too.”

Cheriton settled himself again to slumber with a resigned and peaceful air.

It was five minutes past three before Caroline quitted the table. In spite of her fund of natural shrewdness she could not help feeling—so easy it is for the wisest people to deceive themselves—that she had sat at the feet of a

political Gamaliel who played ducks and drakes with the War Office. As for George Betterton, having been endured with a patience that was not always extended to him, without actually giving himself airs, he felt that upon the subject of the Militia he really was no end of a fellow. Cheriton, who had enjoyed a further half-hour's doze, gave him clearly to understand that he concurred in that opinion.

Back in the drawing-room, Caroline Crewkerne reaffirmed her intention of destroying the half-finished portrait of her niece.

"An act of great presumption," said she. "Besides, the man was downright insolent."

Cheriton had looked for the canvas already, and with a whimsical little sigh had looked in vain. It would seem that the myrmidons of the Bond Street Galleries had done their work.

"Be more lenient, my dear Caroline," he said persuasively. "Only a boy, you know, and his lot is hard. Don't take the bread out of the mouth of a rising genius who has to support his mother. George, my dear fellow, throw your weight into the scale. Caroline must be more humane. Rising young man—highly susceptible—wholly captivated by our distracting Miss Goose. Any young painter with any sort of instinct or Nature's fairest and noblest would have done the same."

Cheriton was suddenly interrupted by a sharp exclamation.

"Why," cried Caroline, "the picture has been taken away!"

Marchbanks was summoned.

"Two men from Peabody's fetched it nearly an hour ago, my lady," the butler explained.

"Without my permission," his mistress stormed.

"I had no instructions, my lady. I was under the im-

pression that it was the property of the young painting gentleman."

"You were under the impression!"

"Caroline," said Cheriton gravely, "if you have not been properly scored off it looks uncommonly like it. Young fellow evidently didn't allow the grass to grow under his feet. He said he would send for it to-morrow, but he seems to have changed his mind. Still, in my humble view, if you must blame anybody you will do well to blame George. If he hadn't been so devilish interesting on the subject of the Militia it could never have happened."

## CHAPTER XVI

### HYDE PARK

**L**ITTLE recked Jim Lascelles of the train of circumstances which enabled his precious half-finished work to return to its maker. When it arrived at his hermitage at Laxton that afternoon he merely saw in its premature return one affront the more. He took it for granted that the old woman of Hill Street had ordered it out of her house.

“An absolutely inconceivable old cat!” Jim assured his mother with great truculence.

“I am afraid so, my son,” was the sage reply. “Power is so bad for poor Female Us.”

“She has ruined me,” said Jim miserably. “She and that infernal temper of mine.”

“Temper is feminine too, my son,” said the mother profoundly. “She invariably plays Old Harry when she gets hold of the reins.”

Jim’s mother had recently tried to eke out her slender means by writing a novel. That, at least, is the only explanation as to how she came to be so wise.

Jim was woefully gloomy for many days. He felt that by his unlucky outburst he had irretrievably ruined his prospects. And they were getting suddenly so bright that they had almost dazzled him. Not only had he forfeited the hundred pounds which Lord Cheriton had promised him for a faithful copy of the Gainsborough, but doubtless, after such an unlucky exhibition of temper, Lord Kendal’s daughter Priscilla would choose to be painted by somebody else.

This, however, was not the worst. The Goose Girl had passed clean out of his ken. Henceforth he would be debarred the sight of the Gainsborough hat, the lilac frock, and the full-fledged cream-bun appearance. She had driven the unfortunate youth so nearly to distraction that while he found it impossible to expel her from his thoughts, he could not summon the force of will to unlock the door of the studio he had caused to be set up in the small Laxton back garden. It was like baring a nerve to gaze upon the half-finished canvas, which now could never be complete.

By nature Jim Lascelles was a bright and cheery soul. But the fact that he had destroyed his prospects "just as things were coming his way" by one rash act made him extremely unhappy. It needed all Mrs. Lascelles' gay courage and invincible optimism to keep Jim steady during these days of trial.

"Finish the creature out of your head," was her counsel, "then forget that she ever existed."

"Nay," said Jim. "Either I must put in all I know or stick a knife through the canvas."

He brooded dreadfully upon the subject. Dark lines came under his eyes; he smoked too much and ate too little.

"I must and I will see her," he said.

"The true spirit, my son," said his mother approvingly.

It is a nice point whether she ought to have openly approved such a course of action. It was very necessary, all the same, to rouse Jim from the lethargy that was making his life unbearable. From the mere resolution he seemed to derive a certain inward power.

The next morning Jim made his way to Hyde Park. It was now June, and the park was looking its best, with the trees, the rhododendrons and the ladies in full bloom. For some time the young man stood by the railings with

a sort of undefined hope in his mind that he would be rewarded for his pilgrimage. Then he walked slowly in the Knightsbridge direction; and confronted by so much fine plumage, he began to wish ruefully that his navy blue suit did not shine quite so much and that his straw hat was not in its third season.

He was still hopeful, however. He took a careful survey of the riders. Somewhat oddly, his attention was attracted to a heavy, red-faced, rather stupid-looking man who was pounding along on a gray horse. His appearance was perfectly familiar to Jim Lascelles, yet for the moment he could not remember where and when he had seen him.

It was with a curious mingling of satisfaction and disgust that Jim was able to recall the red-faced man's identity. He stopped and turned his eyes to follow that solemn progress. Yes, it was undoubtedly he. And there at the Apsley House corner was a chestnut horse, tall, proud, upstanding, crowned by a royal creature, in her turn crowned by the light of the morning. At a respectful distance of thirty paces was Mr. Bryant, seated as upright as his own cockade on a rather less magnificent charger. Even he, a man of exclusive instincts, did not attempt to veil a legitimate pride in his company. Not for many moons had he seen aught to compare with the wonderful Miss Perry.

The eyes of Jim grew dark as they followed the man with the red face and marked his informal greeting of the Goose Girl. Envy is an ignoble passion, but it has to be confessed that the young fellow swore to himself softly. Then he took out his watch, one of those admirable American one-and-a-half dollar affairs, guaranteed to keep correct time for quite a long period.

"Three minutes past eleven," said he. "Oho, my merry man!"

Just what Jim Lascelles meant by that mystic remark who shall say? But it seemed to please him. He then observed that the little cavalcade had turned the corner and had started to come slowly down by the railings upon the left.

Jim stood to await it with a beating heart. It was rather poor behavior, but he was in a desperate and defiant mood.

“Five to one she cuts you,” Jim muttered. “Two to one she cuts you dead. They are all alike when they mount the high horse.”

As Jim Lascelles awaited the oncoming cavalcade he no longer thought ruefully of his old straw hat and his shabby suit. They were now dear to him as the livery of impending martyrdom.

Gobo hugged the railings. He was so close that he nearly touched Jim with his spurs—dummy spurs as that keen observer noted. Miss Perry was explaining that all the girls had white frocks at Buckingham Palace, and how much she wished that Muffin had been there, as a white frock always suited her, although she generally tore it to rags, when Miss Featherbrain was accosted by the steady and unflinching gaze of Jim Lascelles. Instantly her hand went up, not one of darned cotton, but a yellow gauntletted affair that matched her hair, in quite the regulation Widdiford manner.

“Why—why—it’s Jim. Hello, Jim!”

In the ear of Jim Lascelles the incomparably foolish speech had never sounded so absurd and so delicious. It was clearly the intention of Miss Perry to hold animated discourse with the undeniably handsome young man who returned her greeting. But the intervention of the highest branch of the peerage, as solemn as the British constitution and as solid too, between her and the railings, and the fact that there was a resolutely on-



coming rearguard in the person of the scandalized Mr. Bryant, who in his own mind was reasonably sure that the presumptuous youth by the railings had no connection with the peerage whatever, sufficed to keep Miss Perry in the straight path.

Therefore Jim Lascelles had no content with one of the old Widdiford smiles, which nevertheless was enchanting, and a parting wave of the yellow gauntlet, which was the perfection of friendliness, comradeship, and natural simplicity. He stood to watch the cavalcade pass slowly along the Row, the superb chestnut and its rider the observed of all observers, for both were great works of Nature, elemental but magnificent. The red-faced and stolid personage on the gray, a more sophisticated pair, were yet well in the picture also, for if less majestic, they too were in their way imposing.

Jim's reverie was interrupted by a voice at his elbow.

"There they go," it said, "the most ill-assorted pair in England."

With a start of surprise Jim turned, to discover an exquisite beside him. Cheriton was wearing a light gray frock coat with an exaggerated air of fashion.

"Crabbed age and youth," said Jim, yet quite without bitterness. He was still glowing with pleasure at his frank and friendly recognition.

"A pitiful sight," said Cheriton. "A man of his age! How odd it is that some men are born without a sense of the incongruous!"

Jim agreed.

"Gal looks well outside a horse. Very well indeed. Pity that old ruffian should ruin so fair a picture."

Cheriton seemed ready to criticize his rival's style of horsemanship. Reluctantly, however, he forbore to do so. For George, in spite of his weight and his years,

was still able to make a creditable appearance in the saddle.

"Do you know, sir," said Jim, "I'm rather sorry that I didn't attempt an equestrian portrait."

Cheriton's brows went up.

"Upon my word," said he, "you are uncommonly bold to mention the word 'portrait.'"

"I quite agree with you," said Jim.

He laughed rather bitterly. Cheriton assumed the paternal air which sat so well upon him.

"My friend," said he, "at school your father was at great pains to imbue me with the elements of wisdom, and I feel that fact entitles me to a little plain speaking."

"Go on, Lord Cheriton," said Jim gloomily. "Rub it in."

My lord assumed the air of a "head beak." "I am afraid, Lascelles," he said, "your conduct merits censure in the highest degree."

"It has received it," said Jim. "I've been kicking myself for a hot-headed fool ever since the thing happened."

"One is almost afraid," said Cheriton ruefully, "that it is beyond forgiveness. Really, Lascelles, making due allowance for the fact that your father was one of the hastiest men I ever met, and allowing further for the fact that the manner of my old friend is, shall we say? a little abrupt, your behavior amounts neither more nor less than to suicide."

"As far as that old Gorgon of a woman is concerned," said Jim stoutly, "I have no regrets. I should act again in the same way if I were faced by the same position. But I know it was very unwise. As for the portrait, I intend, by hook or by crook, to finish it."

"Well, my friend," said his mentor, giving the young man's arm a kindly parting pat, "do what you can; and when the *chef-d'œuvre* is complete you must let me see it."

It was a new Jim Lascelles who returned to Laxton by the twelve-thirty from Victoria and took luncheon with his mother. He called at the greengrocer's just as you get out of the station, and arrived at The Acacias with divers choice fruits of the earth in divers paper bags. He hummed the favorite air in the very latest musical comedy, while he proceeded to make a salad with a technic acquired in Paris. He had been initiated into it by Monsieur Bonnat, the famous *chef* of the Hôtel Brinvilliers. And it so happened that Mrs. Lascelles, who spoiled her only child completely, had purchased a lobster, which she really couldn't afford in the present state of her finances and the current price of that delicacy, to cheer Jim up a bit.

"My dear," said Jim, "let us have the last bottle of the Johannisberg."

A demure little maid-of-all-work, Miranda by name, was magnificently asked to produce the same.

"Pity 'tis the last," sighed Jim. And then toasting his mother, "May those blighted publishers learn to appreciate a very remarkable literary genius, my dear."

"They do, my son. That is the trouble."

"It's a rattling good story, anyhow."

"Certainly it ends as every self-respecting and well-conducted story ought to end. But as to literary genius, that's another pair of shoes. The divine spark simply isn't there."

"Oh, indeed!" Jim brought down his fist upon the table fiercely.

"Dear fellow! At any rate, I am enough of a genius to like appreciation. But with you, my son, it's another story. You really are 'the goods' as they say in America."

"They are t'other side of the table, my dear."

"But the Real Right Thing is outside in the garden

waiting for the hand of the master to complete her.”

“Hand of the master, forsooth! You pile it on ‘a leetle beet tick’ as Monsieur Gillet would say. But I’ll let you into a secret. I saw the Goose Girl this morning.”

“Of course you did, dear boy.”

“How did you guess?”

“The step on the gravel told me.”

“You *are* wonderful, you know.”

“That vain, wicked, foolish, and depraved Goose! In Hyde Park this morning you met her walking with her duke, and she gave you a smile, and if she was more than usually absurd, she said, ‘Why, it’s Jim!’ ”

“She was *à cheval*. But you *are* wonderful, aren’t you now?”

“And pray how did the great overgrown creature look outside a horse?”

“One could never have believed it. She was on a glorious chestnut, a mountain of a beast, a noble stepper; and in a smart new habit and a coquettish billycock—think on it, my dear, the Goose Girl in a billycock!—she was a sight for the gods.”

“Yes, just the creature to set High Olympus in a roar.”

“And to the manner born, mark you. And to think she acquired the art of equitation in the home paddock at Widdiford on that screw of the governor’s.”

“Poor dear Melancthon was by no means a screw, I assure you. A horse of pedigree. By Martin Luther out of Moll Cutpurse.”

“I humbly beg his pardon, I’m sure. That explains the Goose Girl’s proficiency. She certainly looked this morning as if she could never condescend to anything less than the blood of Carbine.”

“The secret of the whole matter, my son,” said Jim’s mother profoundly, “is that the Female Us is so marvelously adaptable. If She is really well turned out on

a fine June morning and all London gazing at Her, if She never learned to sit aught but a rocking-horse, She would still contrive to look as though She had won the whole gymkhana. That's the quality which maketh Puss so soon get too big for her dancing slippers."

"Well, you wise woman, the Goose Girl would have taken all the prizes this morning. And she didn't even cut me."

"Cut you, my son. *Gott im himmel!* that Goose cut you indeed!"

"There are not many Goose Girls that wouldn't have in the circumstances. But she is True Blue. And I am going to finish her portrait and make her permanently famous."

Jim's mother tilted the last of the Johannisberg into his glass.

"Excellent, my son. Go in and win. Lavish your genius upon her. Earn fortune and renown, and buy back the Red House at Widdiford."

"And in the meantime she will have married that old fossil and borne him three children."

"Oh, no, she will not," said the voice of the temptress, "if first you make her promise you."

"But that wouldn't be cricket, my dear, with her people so miserably poor and James Lascelles by no means affluent; and the old fossil with a house in Piccadilly and another in Notts and another in Fife, and a yacht in the Solent and a box at the Opera and a mausoleum at Kensal Green. No, my dear, I'm afraid it wouldn't be playing the game."

Thereupon Jim's mother exposed herself to the censure of all self-respecting people. Said she——

"Nor would it be playing the game for that perfect dear of a Goose to have her youth, her beauty, and her gayety bought by a wordly old wretch who ought to be a grand-

father. Come, sir, she awaits her very *parfit gentil* knight."

But Jim shook his head solemnly.

"No, my dear, I'm afraid it won't do."

Nevertheless, as soon as luncheon was over, Jim took the studio key off the dining-room chimney piece and went forth to the primitive wooden erection in the back garden. The key turned stiffly in the lock. It was nearly three weeks since he had entered it last. For several hours he worked joyfully, touching and retouching the picture and improvising small details out of his head. And all the time the Goose Girl smiled upon him in the old Widdiford manner. Her hair had never looked so yellow, her eyes had never looked so blue.

## CHAPTER XVII

### STARTLING DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEMALE US

**T**HE next morning a little before eleven Miss Perry, in the care of the admirable Mr. Bryant, was approaching Apsley House, when the figure of a solitary horseman was to be seen. There was something about this apparition which fixed Miss Perry's attention. Suddenly she gave a little exclamation. The horseman was Jim Lascelles.

Jim received a most affectionate greeting.

"You are just in time," said he. "It is a near thing. Gobo is yonder in the offing. I was afraid he would get here before you."

Miss Perry was delighted if a little perplexed by the suggestion that Jim put forward. It was that they should go down the left while Gobo rode up the right.

"But I pr-r-r-omised Gobo," she said.

"Look here, Goose Girl," said Jim with tremendous resolution, "do you suppose I have invested the last half-sovereign I have in the world on the worst hack in London to be cut out by that old duffer? Come on round, you Goose, before he gets up."

Really Miss Perry is hardly to be blamed. Once Jim Lascelles had made up his mind he was will power incarnate. Jim's horse, a nondescript who does not merit serious notice, walked a few paces briskly, the chestnut followed its example, as chestnuts will, and the next thing was that Jim's horse broke into a canter. The chestnut

did likewise. Of course, it was Miss Perry's business to see that it did nothing of the sort. However, she failed in her obvious duty. And then, so swift is the road to perdition, in less time than it takes to record the fact, the chestnut and the nondescript began simply to fly down Rotten Row.

It was a golden morning of June, and such things happen constantly at that vernal season. But as the four pairs of irresponsible hoofs came thundering by, flinging up the tan in all directions and nearly knocking over a policeman, equestrians of both sexes and pedestrians too stared in amazed disapproval. If not absolutely contrary to the park regulations, it was certainly very wrong behavior.

There is every reason to believe that the opinion of that high authority, Mr. Bryant, was even more uncompromising. Not for an instant did he try to cope with the pace that had been set. He was content sadly to watch his charge get farther and farther away. He then turned to look back at the man with the red face, who had just arrived at the turn.

That high personage, who could not see at all well without his spectacles, halted at the turn and looked in vain for Caroline Crewkerne's niece. His friend Cheriton, who had entered the park just in time to be *au courant* with all that had happened, accosted him cheerfully.

"Doctor's orders, George?"

"Ye—es," said George, rather gruffly.

"I warned you years ago, my dear fellow, that any man who drinks port in the middle of the day as a regular thing can count later in life on a martyr's crown."

George looked decidedly cross. He peered to the right and he peered to the left. The ever-receding pair



were now undecipherable to stronger eyes than those of his Grace.

“Seen a gal anywhere?” he inquired rather irritably. There never was a duke since the creation of the order who could bear to be kept waiting.

“I’ve seen several,” said his friend with an air of preternatural innocence.

“I mean that gal of Caroline Crewkerne’s.”

“I was not aware that she had one.”

“Tall, bouncin’ gal,” said his Grace. “Ginger hair.”

“Ginger hair!” said Cheriton. “Tall, bouncin’ girl! Can you mean my ward, Miss Perry?”

“Your ward! What d’ye mean, Cheriton?”

“Caroline Crewkerne seems to think,” said Cheriton coolly, “that I shall serve the best interests of a lonely and unprotected but extraordinary prepossessing girlhood if I act, as it were, *in loco parentis* during Miss Perry’s sojourn in the vast metropolis.”

George began to gobble furiously. It was a sign, however, that his mind was working. It was extremely difficult to set such heavy mechanism in motion.

“If it comes to that,” said he, “I should say I am quite as capable of looking after the gal as you are.”

Cheriton, with genial candor, declared that to be a matter of opinion. “Caroline seems to think, my dear fellow, that somehow I am better suited to the task.”

“Are you though?” said the stubborn George.

“Caroline seems to think,” said Cheriton modestly, “that I am the ideal age for knowledge of the world to dedicate itself to the cause of innocence, beauty and extreme youth.”

“Goin’ to marry the gal, are you?” said George bluntly.

Some men are terribly blunt by nature.

“The exigencies of the case may render even that course expedient,” said Cheriton rather forensically.

“But in any event, my dear George, speaking with perfect frankness, one is inclined to doubt the seemliness of the open pursuit by a man of your age of a wayside flower.”

“What d’ye mean, Cheriton?” said George with a gobble more furious than he had yet achieved.

“What I really mean, my dear fellow, is that you are no longer able to indulge in the pleasures of the chase without your spectacles. Had you been armed with those useful if not particularly ornamental adjuncts to the human countenance, you would have been able to observe that the wonderful Miss Perry—whose hair, by the way, is yellow—was spirited away exactly ninety seconds before you arrived on the scene.”

“Who took her?” By now George Betterton had grown purple with suppressed fury.

“A young fellow took her,” said Cheriton. “A smart, dashing, well-set-up young fellow took her, my dear George. He simply rode up, tossed her the handkerchief, and away they set off hell for leather. They are now at the Albert Memorial.”

As soon as this information was conveyed to George Betterton he did a vain and foolish thing. Without so much as another word he set off in pursuit. It was supremely ridiculous that he should do any such thing. But it is surprising how soon a balanced mind loses its poise, how soon the most accomplished performer topples off the high wire of sanity and discretion. The sight of George pursuing the runaways with a haste that was almost as unseemly as their own was certainly romantic. And at the same time it was an *apéritif* for the amateur of the human heart who was responsible for George’s behavior.

Cheriton stood to watch and to laugh sardonically. In charming fashion the marionette had begun to answer

to the strings. He promised to excel all anticipation.

In the meantime young blood was away like the wind. Faster and faster it went. This was higher, deeper, more exhilarating than any of the old Widdiford mad-nesses. It was in vain that the British public looked pained and that the London police looked important. This was a crowded hour of glorious life; and if at long last all things are to be as if they had not been, there were at least two children of mortal men who felt the cosmos had really done very well indeed to get itself invented.

However, these divine moments at best are only too brief. The nondescript soon began to hang out signals of distress.

"Bellows to mend," said Jim.

Miss Perry had some difficulty in checking the chestnut.

"Jim," she cried breathlessly, "he is almost as strong as your papa's pedigree hunter."

"We've done a record, I think, from the Red House to the Parsonage," said Jim.

Even when they turned to ride back their high spirits received no check. If pitched in a key less emotional, the crowded glorious hour still endured. But Jim's nondescript was no longer quite equal to the earlier rapture.

"Goose Girl, do you know I have made a resolution?"

"Have you, Jim?"

"I have made up my mind to finish that portrait of you in your Gainsborough gown."

"Of course, Jim," said Miss Perry.

"That picture is to be a masterpiece, you know."

"Is it, Jim?" said Miss Perry.

"It is." Jim's finality was tremendous. "And when it has made me famous, what do you suppose I am going to do?"

"I don't know, Jim," said Miss Perry.

"Guess."

Miss Perry knitted her brows in sheer perplexity.

"Marry Muffin."

"What, marry the Ragamuffin!" said Jim scornfully.

"She is prettier than Polly."

"But she is such a Ragamuffin; and she has never an incredible hat and a Gainsborough frock to call her own."

"She has her mauve, Jim."

"No," said Jim with decision; "in spite of her mauve, I decline to marry the Ragamuffin."

Miss Perry looked vastly disappointed.

"Milly is too young, Jim."

Jim pressed the nondescript. The ice was getting desperately thin. And every moment the light of the morning was making it thinner.

"Goose Girl, do you remember that once you promised to marry me?"

"Yes, Jim, I did," said Miss Perry, "if you got those three large pears off the William pear tree at the Red House at Widdiford."

"I got them off all right," said Jim. "But instead of receiving your hand in matrimony I got a proper good hiding."

"The pears were awfully nice though," said the daughter of Eve.

The High Personage who controls the limelight began to play most embarrassing tricks with the light of the morning. The hapless Jim Lascelles knew he was no match for that Master Hand.

"Goose Girl," said Jim defiantly, "assuming for a moment that I made myself famous enough to buy back the Red House at Widdiford, with the strawberry beds, the orchards, and the old lych-gate that opens on the back lane which takes you straight to the Vicarage—would you keep the promise that you made when you

were a long-legged creature of seven, with an enormous appetite, and I was a freckled and chubby youth of thirteen and a half with horribly thin trousers."

"Yes, Jim, I would," said Miss Perry, with promptitude, frankness and sincerity.

"There now, I've done it," groaned Jim. "It was bound to happen. I knew the Royal Daylight would force me to make a cad of myself before it was through with its sticks. But if people will have yellow hair and they will wear yellow gauntlets to match it, and it is the will of Allah that the limelight be split all over the place, how can a poor painting chap help himself?"

Miss Perry grew very serious. She was silent for twenty-five seconds.

"Jim," she said with great solemnity, "if you *do* marry anybody I r-r-r-really think it ought to be Muffin."

"That Ragamuffin."

"She is too sweet, Jim," said Miss Perry. "And she is *ever* so pretty; and dearest papa thinks she might be clever; and of course you know, Jim, I am rather a Silly."

"All the world knows it."

"And Muffin always said she would just love to live at the Red House at Widdiford."

"Goose Girl, I am afraid you are deep. You want to marry Gobo."

"Not r-r-really," said Miss Perry, wide-eyed with earnestness. "Of course he is a sweet, but—but of course, Jim, he is not like you are."

"Thanks very much for the information. But tell me, Goose Girl, wouldn't you like to be a duchess?"

"Oh no, Jim."

"Why not, you Goose?"

"It sounds rather silly."

"So it does, now you come to mention it. But con-

sider all the wonderful frocks and jewels you would have, and the wonderful houses and the wonderful horses, and the wonderful ices of every conceivable color and flavor. And as for cream buns, a duchess can have as many as she requires."

"I would rather have the Red House at Widdiford."

"Really," said Jim, "you are the most tremendous thing in Geese. Just think what you could do if you were a duchess. You could buy old books and new vestments for your papa; Muffin could have a new mauve frock; Polly could marry her curate and boast of her sister Mrs. Strawberry-leaf; and Milly could pay more attention to hockey and Persian kittens and less to knitting and self-improvement; and as for Dickie and Charley, one could go to Sandhurst and the other to Oxford, and both end in the *Dictionary of National Biography*."

The blue eyes of Miss Perry opened in sheer dazzlement to dimensions that were perfectly astonishing.

"It would be awfully nice," said she; "but Jim—"

"Well?"

"I did pr-r-romise, didn't I?"

"You would never have got those pears if you hadn't."

As they neared the turn at Hyde Park Corner they began unconsciously to pull themselves together. The accusing figure of Mr. Bryant awaited them. Lord Cheriton too was only a little way off. He stood by the railings, a picture of outraged delicacy.

When the runaways came alongside he held both hands before his face with a gesture of dismay.

"I am dumb," he said.

Jim Lascelles appeared to be smitten with a similar infirmity. As for Miss Perry, the instincts of her sex at once took charge of the situation.

"*Have* you seen Gobo?" she demanded breathlessly. Nothing could have been more disarming than the

blend of absolute innocence and disinterested concern.

"I could never have believed it," said Cheriton with a pained air. "The guile, the duplicity."

"*Have* you seen him?" Miss Perry demanded.

"Have I seen Gobo? I have seen a roaring lion in the guise of a rampant turkey cock."

"It is an awful pity. We *missed* him."

Cheriton felt that such gravely sweet concern was never seen in any human countenance. To have questioned its sincerity would have been barbarism.

"Yes, a great pity," Cheriton assented. "Particularly for men of a rather full habit of body who are decidedly short in the neck."

"Do you think Gobo will mind?" said Miss Perry. "You see Jim"—the handle of Jim's crop was ominously near to her knee—"Mr. Lascelles came up, and we thought if we went down we should be sure to meet Gobo, but we didn't."

"Lascelles," said my lord, "isn't it time you began to play up a bit? Miss Araminta's lucidity is delicious, but somehow one feels that it needs eking out a little. Your version will be interesting."

"My horse, sir, cost half-a-sovereign which I couldn't afford," was the rather lame response, "and I thought as it was a fine morning I had better have my money's worth."

Cheriton's smile expanded to the dimensions of his necktie.

"Yes," said he, laughing, "this sort of thing is best left to the ladies. The version of Miss Goose was pitched in just the right key. It clearly suggested that no shadow of blame rested upon either of you. Unhappily your version does not tend to exonerate you equally. I confess, Lascelles, that upon my mind it leaves quite an unfortunate impression."

"The truth is," said Jim, "I am seeking a fresh store of inspiration to complete a *chef d'œuvre*."

"I think it should be a masterpiece undoubtedly."

"I think so too, Lord Cheriton."

Miss Perry's far-seeing, West-country eyes were searching the far horizon.

"Gobo is coming," she said thrillingly.

"Which way?"

"He is coming up on the right. Don't you see him?"

Jim had to strain his gaze.

"By Jove, you are right!" said he. "What wonderful eyes you have, Miss Perry."

"One seems to remember," said Cheriton, "that Red Riding Hood made a similar observation to the wolf, or was it the wolf who made the observation to Red Riding Hood?"

"Better be going, I think," said Jim. "This quaint beast of mine seems to have got his wind back."

"*Has* he, Jim?" said Miss Perry.

The nondescript took a turn to the left. In the most natural manner the chestnut followed suit. On this occasion, however, the distance between the Vicarage and the Red House at Widdiford was not accomplished in quite such record time. All the same, for the greater part of the way the pace was decidedly hot.

"Seen anything of the lady, George?" inquired his friend as soon as he came up.

The thundercloud visage of his Grace was the color of doom.

"I saw a cloud of dust just now. There was a ginger-haired gal in it going at a dooce of a rattle."

"I can't imagine my ward Miss Perry attempting anything in the nature of a rattle."

"Can't you?" sourly grunted George Betterton.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### FASHION COMES TO THE ACACIAS

**J**IM LASCELLES was inclined to regard his morning as a great success. True, it had cost him the last half-sovereign he had in the world, but there was no doubt it had been invested to full advantage. New inspiration had sprung from that memorable ride. For a whole week the recollection of it sustained him. His days were given up to joyous labor in the back garden.

“I shall make something of her after all,” said he.

One morning when he came down to breakfast he found a letter at the side of his plate. The envelope had rather an air. Upon the back of it was a coronet.

“What ho!” said Jim.

A pair of eyes by no means ill found in the wisdom of this world had duly noted these details.

“The correspondent of dukes! Which of them, my son?”

Jim tossed the contents of the envelope across the table with a grin.

*Dear Lascelles,—The art of the age seems clearly to call for the presence at The Acacias of the wonderful Miss Perry. Unless the fates are adverse—which according to Juvenal they are sometimes—she will appear about 4.30 o'clock to-morrow (Tuesday) afternoon to claim in her own person a cup of tea, together with two lumps of sugar and one cream bun, Gunter's large size.*

*Forgive the scant notice. Our old and common friend did not develop sufficiently marked symptoms of laryngitis until this morning to submit to the decree of her medical adviser. He has ordered her to keep her bed. The accomplished Miss Burden accompanies us in an official capacity. Ponto does not.*

*Sincerely yours,*

*CHERITON.*

*P.S.—Strawberries and cream are known to be very delectable.*

Mrs. Lascelles was vastly amused.

“Never tell me, my son, that an indulgent Providence does not watch over the humblest suburban. Three persons of fashion are descending upon us, and the Miss Champneys are sure to pay a call—they always pay a call—this afternoon.”

“Those old guys,” said Jim. “I hope not.”

“Learn, my son, to be more respectful towards the two great ladies of our neighborhood, the real live daughters of a dean lately deceased.”

“I beg their pardon, I’m sure.”

“The great world is unsettling you, my boy. I’m afraid you are already beginning to patronize a ridiculous old frump like me.”

“Beginning!”

“But please remember I am determined not to be patronized in my own house by your friend the duke.”

“Oh! he won’t try to. He’s a very civil old thing.”

“I won’t be patronized by that Goose either.”

“You’re in no danger from her. She’ll be fully occupied with the strawberries and cream.”

“And who, pray, is the accomplished Miss Burden? I will not be patronized by her either.”

"I won't answer for you there, señora. You may get short shrift from that quarter."

"We shall see, my son," said Jim's mother almost with truculence.

The drawing-room at The Acacias was really a very mediocre affair. It had so little furniture that it was made to look half as large again as it actually was. The small room was cool and tasteful, but there was hardly a suggestion of bygone grandeur. For one thing, "the crash" had been rather in the nature of a holocaust, and an opulent past does not help a penurious present.

The walls were decorated by a blue wash and by a single picture, a study by Monsieur Gillet for his enchanting "La Dame au Gant." It had been given by that master to a young English pupil of whom he prophesied great things. Then there was a little shelf of books, comprising five novels of Turgenev, two by Stendhal, three by Anatole France, four by Meredith, three by Henry James, two volumes of Heine, the lyrics of Victor Hugo, two plays of D'Annunzio and a volume of Swinburne. There were two bowls of roses also, which Jim procured in honor of the occasion.

At a quarter to four Mrs. Lascelles sat reading *La Chartreuse de Parme* for the thirteenth time. She looked charm incarnate in a soft black dress, embellished with white muslin. Her look of youth was quite aggressive, and in Jim's opinion her furtive smile of tempered gayety was perfectly irresistible.

"My dear," said Jim censoriously, "it is time you made a serious effort to look older."

"I do try so hard," said Mrs. Lascelles plaintively. "This is positively the most frumpish frock I possess, and I have done my hair over my ears on purpose."

"Haven't you an older frock?"

"This one is decidedly the elder of my only two."

"How old is it?"

"Seven years."

"And what is the age of the other one?"

"A mere infant. It is only five."

"Then it is high time you had a new one."

"It is not usual, I believe, for a woman to get a new frock for the purpose of making herself look older."

"But then you are a most unusual woman."

"I don't in the least want to be unusual. If there is one thing I dislike more intensely than another it is an unusual woman."

"Then you are very perverse. I wonder what effect it would have if you did your hair higher?"

"I will try if you like; but I know—"

"What do you know?" said Jim sternly.

"That I never look quite so maternal as when I have it over my ears."

"Well, it's a serious matter. I look like being driven to get a new mother."

"There's a scarcity of good ones, my son."

Jim scanned the tiny room with the eye of criticism.

"I'm afraid we have an air of cheap gentility," said Mrs. Lascelles. "But let no one sneer at it. Gentility of any kind is quite an honorable aspiration."

"I wonder," said Jim, "if there is anybody in the neighborhood who would lend us a *Debrett* for the afternoon? It might grace the middle of the room, upon that small Chinese table."

The front doorbell was heard to ring.

"Too late, too late," said Mrs. Lascelles dramatically. "*Debrett* is here already."

"It is the Miss Champneys," said Jim.

"Alas, no! It is only twenty past four, and it is so much more impressive to pay a call at five."

"Two to one it's *la famille* Hobson."

The countenance of Jim's mother grew tragic.

"*Quelle horreur!* One had quite forgotten the existence of *la famille* Hobson. Do you really think it can be?"

"I am perfectly sure of it," said Jim. "This is an opportunity it could not possibly miss."

Mrs. Lascelles lifted up her voice in lamentation.

"These things are sent to try us," said Jim stoically. "*La famille* Hobson has no other reason to be."

Mrs. Lascelles was overcome.

The little maid-of-all-work entered the room. With her prim freckled countenance and her hair, which like herself was quite unnecessarily pretty, done over a roll, she had the furtive air of a cat who is a confirmed cream stealer. Moreover, she had the air of one who takes an uncanny interest in all the things around her.

"Miss Burden," announced Miranda, as though it gave her great pleasure to do so. "Miss Perry. Lord Cherton."

Jim's mother laid *La Chartreuse de Parme* upon the varnished boards. She rose to greet Miss Perry with a suppressed exclamation. In the circumstances it was not unnatural, for Miss Perry was looking a goddess.

She took a hand of Miss Perry in each of her own. "My dear!" she gasped.

Miss Perry's only reply was to proceed to hug Jim's mother in the traditional Widdiford manner. The hostess appeared to sustain some little personal inconvenience in the process. "But you are wonderful!" she gasped.

Jim presented Miss Burden to his mother with becoming formality. There was always a veiled tenderness about the eyes of Miss Burden which somehow rendered her oddly attractive. Her air of shyness was an added charm.

“So nice of you to come,” said Mrs. Lascelles. She had fallen in love with Miss Burden at first sight.

“Lord Cheriton,” said Jim with excellent gravity, “may I introduce you to my mother.”

Bows and a fashionable handshake ensued. And then Mrs. Lascelles gazed into the complacent and amused countenance of my lord.

“How can I thank you,” she said, “for your great kindness to Jim.”

My lord denied the great kindness with conventional grace, and then said, “What remarkable sunshine for London!”

“The sun is occasionally quite obtrusive at Laxton,” said Mrs. Lascelles, lowering the sun blind a little. “You will find that the coolest chair, Lord Cheriton.”

It was really not necessary to offer the coolest chair to Lord Cheriton, for he looked cool enough already. It was perhaps his most assiduously cultivated and most carefully cherished characteristic. However, he took the chair Mrs. Lascelles had indicated. He took it almost as if he were paying it homage. Choosing a likely spot upon the varnished boards upon which to set his top hat, he placed it there with rare precision and crossed his lavender-trousered legs to display a very immaculate pair of white gaiters. Then he fixed a black-rimmed eyeglass in the left or more fashionable eye and surveyed his surroundings with an air of benevolence that was really most engaging.

By the time Cheriton appeared to be pleasantly settled and Mrs. Lascelles had fully recovered from the effects of Miss Perry’s third hug, she said—

“Please ring the bell, my son.”

The little maid-of-all-work entered.

“Tea, Miranda, please.”

Miranda embellished this command with an entirely

unnecessary half-curtsey which she was apt to produce on state occasions. It was a quite effective little affair, although its true place was undoubtedly a comic opera.

Miss Burden addressed a remark to the hostess.

"Do you think the exhibition of the Royal Academy is as good as the last one?"

"I think it is better," said Mrs. Lascelles, "decidedly better, don't you?"

"That is because there is a picture by a young fellow of the name of Lascelles in it," said Jim.

"A sufficient reason," said my lord.

"The brutes have skyed me though," said Jim.

"Jealousy, my dear fellow," said Cheriton. "The Church, the Stage, and the Fine Arts live in perpetual dread of the rising generation."

"That is so true, Lord Cheriton," said Jim's mother. "I am so glad to hear you say that. Of course it is jealousy. Those musty and stereotyped old R.A.'s are horribly afraid of young men with new ideas."

With the deference of a courtier my lord concurred.

"My mother expects all the world and his wife to proclaim her son's genius," said Jim aggrievedly.

"Personally," said Cheriton, "I do not find it at all hard to obey that condition."

"People of taste seldom do," said Jim's mother, beaming upon the flatterer.

The little maid-of-all-work appeared with the tea.

"Miranda, if Mrs. Hobson calls or Miss Hobson, or Miss Hermia Hobson or Miss Hermione Hobson or Mr. Hobson or Mr. Herbert Hobson or Mr. Henry Hobson calls, I am not at home."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Miranda with an air of intelligence and a further display of the comic-opera curtsy.

"Sugar or lemon?" Miss Burden was asked.

She took sugar, a small lump. Miss Perry took two lumps, size not stated.

"I wish these cups were more sensible," said Mrs. Lascelles with a reminiscence and an apology.

"That cup is absurd, my dear," said Jim.

Miss Perry seemed inclined to agree.

"Fetch the largest cup we have, Miranda, please."

"Thank you *ever* so much, dear Mrs. Lascelles," said Miss Perry.

Strawberries and cream began the modest feast. But a plate of cream buns, Gunter's large size, specially procured, was the undoubted *pièce de résistance* of the repast. This, however, Jim placed on the chimney piece in a very ostentatious manner, indulging as he did so in a classical quotation. Lord Cheriton laughed appreciatively; it is possible that Miss Burden understood it also, but Mrs. Lascelles seemed a little in the dark. As for Miss Perry, her ignorance was frank and unabashed.

"What *does* it mean?" she demanded with a thrill in her voice and her eyes very wide.

"It means," said Jim, "that it is better to contemplate from afar the rewards of virtue than to partake of them prematurely."

"A free translation, Lascelles," said my lord, "credit-able alike to your scholarship, your literary instinct, and your knowledge of human nature."

"But you *owe* me one," said Miss Perry. "Doesn't he, Lord Cheriton?"

That peer having reluctantly admitted this to be the case, Jim presented Miss Perry with a cream bun on a blue china plate.

"The spotted cake with the almonds on it is absolutely topping," said he, maliciously seeking to embarrass Miss Perry with riches.

"I will try some," said Miss Perry.



Lord Cheriton took lemon with his tea, also a rusk.

"Genius is a delightful thing," said he conversationally.

"I have a genius for admiring it in others."

"I am trying to cultivate it also," said Jim's mother.

"This spotted cake with almonds in it is too awfully nice," proclaimed Miss Perry.

"The confection with the pink icing and the sugar plums is also greatly admired here," said Jim.

"May I try some, *please?*" said Miss Perry with large eyes. "Just a weeny piece. Pink icing is *too* nice, I think, don't you?"

"I concur," said Jim, carving a very liberal chunk.

In almost the same moment a loud peal proceeded from the front doorbell. Mrs. Lascelles was hard set to conceal her anxiety.

"I hope," she said in an aside to Jim, "our small Cerberus will prove equal to a frontal attack by *la famille* Hobson."

"Not a doubt of that," said Jim with splendid optimism.

A minute later Miranda entered with an air of singular importance. She announced—

"Lady Charlotte Greg, Miss Champneys, Miss Laetitia Champneys."

The space of the small room was sensibly diminished by the entrance of three ladies. In manner and appearance they were oddly alike. Each had a black and white dress with *passementerie* trimmings, a small toque, a feather boa and buttoned boots with flat heels.

Miss Champneys, whose port was decidedly severe, introduced to Mrs. Lascelles her old friend Lady Charlotte Greg who was staying with them at The Laurels for the purpose of opening the Sale of Work at Saint Remigius. Lady Charlotte Greg, the daughter of a successful lawyer and the wife of an evangelical bishop,

conveyed the right degree of distance in her greeting. Between a tiny Laxton back drawing-room and the Palace at Marchester the distance, after all, is quite considerable.

While these three somewhat large ladies were adjusting themselves to three chairs decidedly on the small side, and they were offered tea from a fresh brew duly procured by the assiduous Miranda, each lifted a black veil to scrutinize the surroundings and the company with a rather ruthless eye.

All three ladies could not help feeling that Mrs. Lascelles' other visitors were overdressed. And in their view, to be overdressed was to be guilty of one of the cardinal sins.

Said Miss Laetitia Champneys in a judicious undertone to Lady Charlotte Greg: "The girl in that preposterous hat with feathers is an actress surely."

In the sight of Miss Champneys human degradation could hardly go farther.

Said Lady Charlotte Greg, in an identical tone, to Miss Laetitia Champneys: "The person with the eyeglass is, of course, an actor-manager."

Neither Miss Laetitia nor her sister Miss Champneys was quite sure what an actor-manager really was; but their faith in Lady Charlotte's knowledge of the world was boundless.

That lady put up her glasses and proceeded to study the actor-manager, a rare species of wild fowl of which the Close at Marchester was mercifully free. Still the actor-manager appeared to suffer no embarrassment. He changed his black-rimmed monocle from his left eye to his right, which if hardly so fashionable as the other one, was rather perversely endowed with better powers of vision.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A SOCIAL TRIUMPH

FOR nearly a minute a battle royal was waged between the monocle and the long-handled folders. All present, with the exception of Miss Perry, who was not in the habit of observing anything, sat in silence to observe the issue. It seemed to be a case of honors easy.

“When is the Sale of Work, Lady Charlotte?” the hostess suddenly found the spirit to ask.

The simple question was frostily received by the three ladies. As the Sale of Work began on the morrow and Mrs. Lascelles had promised to preside over the bran tub this was perhaps not unnatural.

“It begins to-morrow at three o’clock, Mrs. Lascelles,” said Miss Champneys coldly.

“Yes, of course,” said the hostess, “how stupid of me! I knew that perfectly well. What I meant to have said was, what is the day upon which Lady Charlotte will perform the opening ceremony?”

“The *first*,” said Miss Champneys and Miss Laetitia speaking as one.

“Of course,” said the hostess, involuntarily adding, “how stupid of me!” The Miss Champneys were matchless in putting people in the wrong. “What I should have asked was who will perform the ceremony on the second day?”

“The wife of the member,” said Miss Champneys.

“And on the third?” asked the hostess, only too well aware by now that she was floundering badly.

"Lady Caske," said Miss Laetitia.

"The wife of the brewer?" asked Jim.

Jim's artless question provoked quite a display of hauteur. In the first place it was an act of presumption for a young man like Jim to have ventured to ask a question at all, and in the second the kind of question he asked was typical of the neighborhood.

"Lady Caske was a Coxby, I believe," said Miss Champneys icily. Her forbears, according to their own oral and written testimony, had first appeared in these islands in the train of the Conqueror.

"Any relation to the parson?" Cheriton casually inquired.

Lady Charlotte Greg rode again into the lists.

"I am informed that Lady Caske is a niece of the late Archbishop Coxby," said she in a tone and manner which for two decades had cowed the minor clergy of the diocese.

"Same feller, no doubt," said Cheriton. "But I only knew him in his capacity of a bore."

Each of the three ladies seemed to quiver a little.

"Pray *where* did you meet the Archbishop?" demanded Lady Charlotte with dilated nostril.

"In the House," said Cheriton. "Terrible bore in the House."

Lady Charlotte raised her glasses, a fine gesture.

"The domestic life of Archbishop Coxby was renowned for its simplicity," she said.

A pause surcharged with suppressed emotion followed, and then the ludicrous drawl of Miss Perry was heard in the land.

"I think a Sale of Work is too sweet," said that Featherbrain. "We always have one once a year in the Parish Room at Slocum Magna."

The Miss Champneys and Lady Charlotte Greg re-

ceived the announcement very coldly indeed, but this was without the least effect upon Miss Perry. The fine shades of social feeling seemed to mean nothing to her.

"That is really very interesting, my dear Miss Goose," said Cheriton in his most melodious manner; "very interesting indeed."

"We raised eight pounds, two and nine pence for the organ fund last year at Slocum Magna," drawled Miss Perry.

"Where, pray, is Slocum Magna?" inquired Lady Charlotte Greg.

Miss Perry had learned already that whenever Slocum Magna was mentioned in the presence of London people the question was inevitable. However, before she could take steps to enlighten Lady Charlotte my lord favored her with a paternal finger.

"Permit me, my dear Miss Goose," he said elaborately. "Slocum Magna," he proceeded with the weighty air of one who is no stranger to the Front Bench, "is the next village to Widdiford."

"And where, pray, is Widdiford?" inquired Lady Charlotte Greg.

"Widdiford," said Cheriton impressively, "is the place where the Red House is and where they haven't quite got the railway, don't you know."

"But it is only three miles away," chimed Miss Perry.

The pause which followed, an involuntary tribute to the overpowering personality of Lady Charlotte Greg, caused Jim's mother and the Miss Champneys to wonder what was going to happen. Miss Perry, however, was quite undefeated.

"Have you seen the horses at the Hippodrome?" she inquired.

Lady Charlotte had not. The Miss Champneys had not seen them either.

"You ought to see them," said Miss Perry with irresistible friendliness. "They play bridge and fire off guns and pretend to be dead. I have been nine times."

Said Lady Charlotte in the private ear of Miss Laetitia: "Too natural for an actress. Her hair and skin bear inspection. If she were not so painfully overdressed she would be a singularly beautiful girl."

"And that curiously artificial person, can you place him?" asked Miss Laetitia, who had a passion for exact information.

"An actor-manager, unmistakably," said Infallibility with decision.

"The father, do you suppose?" inquired the insatiable Miss Laetitia.

"Dear me, no. That girl is a lady."

All unwittingly, however, the hostess proceeded to deal Infallibility a blow. She made a belated introduction of the noble earl. The bowings and the counter-bowings had hardly subsided when Miss Perry announced that she would like to go to the Sale of Work on the morrow.

"You shall, my dear Araminta," said Cheriton, "provided we have Lady Charlotte's assurance that there will be no harangue from Parson Coxby's daughter."

"Lady Caske does not appear until Friday," said Lady Charlotte, beginning to thaw, "and I only intend to say a few words myself."

The disclosure of Cheriton's identity seemed to humanize Lady Charlotte and the Miss Champneys considerably. Things went now so swimmingly that the tea party expanded to the nature of a social triumph. It was a great afternoon for Jim's mother. The Miss Champneys became singularly agreeable; Lady Charlotte also contrived to soften the first impression she had made.

Miss Burden asked, of *malice prepense*, whether these ladies had seen Mr. Lascelles' picture at the Royal

'Academy. They had not, Miss Burden was assured, but they would make a point of going specially to Burlington House to inspect it. Thereupon Lord Cheriton, with an arch look at Jim's mother, mentioned Mr. Lascelles' undoubted genius.

"Of course," said Miss Laetitia, "Mr. Lascelles must have genius if he exhibits at the Royal Academy."

"Not necessarily, Laetitia," said Lady Charlotte with her natural air of dispensing universal information. "I have known quite second-rate people exhibit at the Royal Academy."

"Have you though?" said Cheriton. "That is interesting."

"There is Mottrom," said Lady Charlotte. "One finds his pictures there continually. Nothing will convince me that Mottrom is first-rate. One feels one must really draw the line at the music of Wagner and the pictures of Mottrom."

"Capital!" murmured Cheriton to no one in particular.

The voice of Miss Perry was heard again in the land.

"Do you like the pictures of Joseph Wright of Derby?" inquired that art critic.

Jim's mother looked at Lord Cheriton and Lord Cheriton looked at Jim's mother.

"A police constable, was he not?" said the elder Miss Champneys,

"Lord Cheriton can tell you," said the helpful Miss Perry.

"Quite likely," said that authority, with the air of one to whom a great truth has presented itself unexpectedly. "To be sure, what could be more natural than Police Constable Joseph Wright of Derby?"

Jim Lascelles began to grow restless, as sensitive souls are apt to do when amateurs talk "shop" for their benefit. And in his capacity of a common-sense young Briton of

athletic tastes he felt that to call a man a genius was much the same as kicking him. Still, mothers are privileged.

For Cheriton, however, there was not that excuse when he made his sudden demand. During a brief pause in the conversation he said, "Won't you take us to see your masterpiece, my dear fellow?"

Jim expressed a polite willingness to do so. But as a preliminary he went to the chimney piece and took up the plate of cream buns. These in hand, he led the way through the open French window to the wooden erection in the garden. Cheriton brought up the rear of the procession, shepherding the six ladies with superb gallantry.

The painting-room contained merely a rug for the floor, a large and comfortable sofa with cushions, and at the far end, in a sumptuous light, the single canvas three parts complete. A dozen studies of the great subject and minor works had been tidied away.

The Miss Champneys gave rein to their admiration.

"But surely," said Lady Charlotte Greg, making great play with her glasses, "but surely this is a very fine picture."

"One is beginning to think so," said Cheriton complacently.

"I have thought so from the first," said the mother of the artist.

Miss Burden declared that she had too.

"I wish I could have worn my party frock," said Miss Perry, without a trace of vanity. "But it is not for out of doors."

"The frock does not trouble me," said Jim. "It is that runcible hat which I am exercised about."

"*Runcible* hat?" said Lady Charlotte Greg.

"She wear-eth a run-ci-ble hat," said Jim.



Without preface or apology Miss Perry seated herself in the center of the sofa and assumed her pose.

"A singularly beautiful sitter," said Lady Charlotte, "and singularly placable."

With an ostentation that in the circumstances was noteworthy Jim Lascelles placed the plate of cream buns on a small table at a respectful distance from the sofa.

"I'm afraid," said Jim politely but firmly, "that I must now ask the public to withdraw."

"Rembrandt himself could not have bettered it," said Cheriton as he stood by the door to usher into the garden the five irresponsible creatures who were babbling rudimentary criticism of the fine arts.

By the time Miss Perry returned to the little sitting-room she had duly earned, received and assimilated two cream buns, Gunter's large size. For her the sitting had been a decided success, and Jim Lascelles also was inclined to view it in that light. Already he had put an immense amount of work into the picture, and he was now beginning to feel that the end was near. And looking at it as it grew, touching and retouching it continually, learning to treat each detail with a boldness and a delicacy of which he had already dared to think himself capable, he could not help feeling that this work stood for growth.

Already he knew it had added a cubit to his stature. Something had been born in him as the crown of seven years' single-minded and assiduous toil. Indeed, the artist was almost beginning to hope that some morning he might wake to find himself famous.

When sitter and painter returned to the house they found my lord reading *La Chartreuse de Parme* aloud to Miss Burden and Jim's mother.

"Now we must fly," said Miss Burden, "I tremble to think what will happen."

“We shall have to plead guilty,” said Cheriton, “to finding the polo at Hurlingham very absorbing.”

But Miss Burden was genuinely alarmed. However, the three distinguished visitors left The Acacias with the request that they might return another day.

## CHAPTER XX

### MISS PERRY HAS HER PALM CROSSED WITH SILVER

**T**HE companion was subjected to harsh treatment on her return to Hill Street. She was forbidden to visit Hurlingham again during the rest of the season. In truth, she felt very guilty and bent her head before the torrent of abuse which, wholly contrary to the doctor's orders, was showered upon her. All the same, Miss Burden knew that she was privy to a romance. In the visit to Laxton elements were comprised which set off to some extent the persecution she had to endure.

Lady Crewkerne's medical adviser, Sir Wotherspoon Ogle, was strongly of opinion that abuse is not good for laryngitis.

"Lady Crewkerne," he said, "do not speak for three days."

"Rubbish!" said the old woman in a husky wheeze.

"I will not answer for the consequences," said Sir Wotherspoon.

"Answer for the consequences, forsooth!" said the formidable patient.

Next day the old woman was rather worse. Nevertheless, for the second time during her illness George Betterton called upon her and was received within the sanctity of her chamber, a proceeding hardly in accord with Sir Wotherspoon's advice.

Cheriton called at half-past twelve the same morning. To him, however, access to the vicinity of the four-poster was sternly denied. When he learned that for half an hour past his rival had been thus favored he became grave indeed.

“What is that man after?” he said mistrustfully to Miss Burden. “No good, I am sure. Yesterday it was the same. They spent an hour together as thick as thieves. And yet she is unable to see her oldest friend, a disinterested adviser and sincere well-wisher.”

Miss Burden could throw no light upon the mystery.

“How is she this morning?” her oldest friend inquired.

“Sir Wotherspoon Ogle does not think at all well of her.”

“Naturally.”

“The mind is so active.”

“Her tongue, you mean.”

Miss Burden dolefully concurred that her tongue was active also.

“Rather late in the day for her to learn to bridle it. But if she won't, so much the worse for her.”

“Sir Wotherspoon finds her a rather trying patient, I'm afraid.”

“If he does not,” said Cheriton, “he is either less than human or he is more.”

My lord afforded Miss Burden and Miss Perry the privilege of his society at luncheon. He proposed that they should spend the afternoon at the Sale of Work in aid of Saint Remigius, Laxton. Miss Perry was charmed with the idea. Miss Burden welcomed it, yet she doubted sorely whether her services could be dispensed with. However, by the exercise of a little diplomacy she learned that the fates were well disposed, for not only was the Duke of Brancaster returning at four o'clock, but her ladyship's solicitor was also expected.

“Her solicitor!” Cheriton exclaimed. “What the dooce does she want with her solicitor?”

My lord seemed perturbed more than a little by the coming of that ominous personage.

“I wonder if the old harridan is capable of playing me a trick?” he mused.

*En route* to Laxton his speculations on the subject were many. In conjunction with George’s assiduity, the appearance of the lawyer on the scene was not a good omen.

At the bazaar, however, Cheriton showed no sign of mental or moral perturbation. The lavender trousers had been exchanged for an art shade of gray. In lieu of a turquoise the tie-pin had a pearl in it; the waistcoat, no longer a complex harmony in lilac, was of plain white *piqué*; and instead of a gold-headed cane he bore the famous ivory-handled umbrella, which had been repaired with such exemplary skill that it left no trace of the recent catastrophe at Saint Sepulchre’s.

All that was best in the life of Laxton and its environs was gathered at the Sale of Work in aid of Saint Remigius. First and foremost was the Vicar of the parish, the Reverend John Overdene Cummings, a man whom all the world delighted to honor, not for his office only, but also for himself. Among his many merits, perhaps that which endeared him most to all that was best in the life of Laxton was an almost exaggerated esteem for what he called “the right people.” It was said in the first instance to be entirely due to Mr. Cummings that the Miss Champneys had prevailed upon their friend Lady Charlotte Greg to perform the opening ceremony.

That august lady had just had great pleasure in declaring the Sale of Work open, when something in the nature of a sensation was caused by the arrival of the wonderful Miss Perry and her attendant ministers.

The Assembly Rooms had been transformed into a Sicilian Village. They were thronged with the fashion, beauty and youth of the district, and also with the gay and brilliant costumes of the peasantry of the sunny south. But there was nothing in that gathering to compare with the blue-eyed and yellow-haired young Amazon, hatted and gowned *à la* Gainsborough. Miss Burden felt there was not; and she, in staid black and white with a scarf of old lace, was not without allure, for she too was tall, her figure was excellent, and she had an air. As for Cheriton, with his glass stuck rather insolently in his left eye, he knew there was nothing, not in Laxton merely, but in the whole of London that season, to compare with Caroline Crewkerne's niece. He was a proud man, and he looked it as, with pardonable ostentation, he found a way for his escort down the precise center of the throng.

Jim's mother, who had had the duty of presiding over the refreshment stall thrust upon her, was thrilled by the apparition of Miss Perry. Small blame to Jim that he had given his days and nights to dreams of such magnificence. And Jim himself, who had turned up more, it is to be feared, in the hope of seeing in public the marvelous hat and its wearer than for any vital interest in the welfare of Saint Remigius, was fired by an odd excitement as he gazed.

"What an air the creature has!" his mother whispered to him. "I never saw anything so regal. She moves like a queen among her subjects. And yet the Goose, under her feathers, hasn't the ghost of an idea about anything in earth or heaven or in Slocum Magna."

"You forget Joseph Wright of Derby, my dear."

"The ridiculous creature!"

Meantime, the progress down the main street of the Sicilian Village was almost royal. The wave of curiosity

such distinguished visitors inspired nearly culminated in their being mobbed. Indeed, royalty was mentioned. The Vicar with his quick eye had a sure instinct immediately excited.

“Dear me,” he said to Miss Laetitia Champneys in exultant tones, “I really believe it must be the Grand Duchess Olga Romano.”

It appeared that a tall and splendid person answering to that name was then in London, who was to be seen continually at charitable bazaars.

“Oh no, Vicar,” said Miss Laetitia, “they are friends of ours.”

A kind of daïs had been erected at the end of the Sicilian Village for the accommodation of the grandees. The distinguished visitors, although they had no *locus standi* whatever as far as Saint Remigius was concerned, took a bee line to the daïs under Cheriton’s direction. A peer of the realm feels it his duty to make straight for a platform whenever and wherever he sees one.

The Miss Champneys greeted Lord Cheriton in stately fashion, while Lady Charlotte shook hands with him at a fashionable angle.

“Introduce me,” said the Vicar to the elder Miss Champneys.

Cheriton prided himself upon being all things to all men. His manner with the Church was agreeably differentiated from what it was with Art or Letters or Law or the Army or Sport or Politics.

“May I be allowed to congratulate you, sir, on the success of your fête,” he said sonorously. “Admirable hall for the purpose. To my mind nothing is more picturesque than a Sicilian Village. The costumes are so rich.”

In the meantime Miss Perry was enjoying herself enormously. The first thing she did was to greet Jim’s

mother with effusion and also Jim. The latter, who was assiduously cultivating the commercial instinct, informed his mother that she was sure of one important customer.

“What awfully nice cakes you have!” said Miss Perry.

She had a small pink one to inaugurate the refreshment stall. Promising to return anon, she then made a tour of the Sicilian Village. In the fancy bazaar, presided over by Mrs. and the Misses Hobson, she made her second purchase.

“Those bed socks are too sweet. I should like to buy them for dearest papa, because his feet are always so cold in the winter. How much are they, please?”

“One guinea,” said Miss Hermia Hobson.

“You can get them cheaper than that at Slocum Magna.”

“Everything at this stall is one guinea,” said Miss Hermia Hobson, “except the antimacassars, and they are five, because they were out in India during the Mutiny.”

“Were they indeed!” Cheriton took up a very fragile and faded article. “During the Mutiny! That is most interesting.”

“Don’t touch them, please,” said Miss Hermia Hobson. “They might easily fall to pieces.”

“I think dearest papa would rather have the bed socks,” said Miss Perry. “They are too sweet.”

Cheriton gallantly disbursed the sum of one guinea.

Miss Perry’s tour of the Sicilian Village resulted in the acquisition of a rag basket of a new and original design, which it appeared that Muffin had always wanted; a pocketknife for Dickie; a mariner’s compass for Charley; an album for Milly; a piece of lace for Polly; and a box of soldiers for the small son of Mrs. Crick, who kept the Post Office at Slocum Magna. A copy of *Persuasion* was procured for Miss Burden, by Lord



Cheriton's advice; and a copy of Law's *Serious Call* for Aunt Caroline, also by the advice of that peer. He himself was content with an orchid, which was fixed in his buttonhole by Miss Laetitia Champneys, Miss Burden holding the pin. Miss Perry had some difficulty in weighing the respective claims of a rabbit that was able to roll its eyes and move its ears and a box of caramels. Eventually she decided in favor of the latter. All the same, she felt that the former would have undoubtedly appealed to Tobias. But it might have had a tendency to make him bloodthirsty.

Afternoon tea at Mrs. Lascelles' stall, to the strains of Chicane's Orchestral Cossacks, who had been specially engaged to appear in Sicily, was a delightful function. The Vicar, the Vicaress, the Miss Champneys and Lady Charlotte Greg all came together to the refreshment stall to drink the fragrant Bohea. The verger of Saint Remigius railed off a special table with a cord to keep back the crowd. It seemed that the Vicar's theory of the Grand Duchess had been overheard and had been at once taken to the heart of that great institution, the British Public. By now it had acquired such a hold that Her Yellow-haired Magnificence in the picture hat was said to be the niece of the Czar.

Cheriton had a pleasing sense of uncertainty as to whether public curiosity was due to the imperious challenge of female beauty or to the appearance and attainments of the sixth earl of that name. Being a very vain man, he was not disinclined to believe it was the latter; therefore he sat in the inclosure sipping his tea with a superb air and preening his plumage like an elderly cockatoo.

"He wears a wig," a member of the public could be heard to say quite distinctly.

"Oh, yes," said a second member, with an air of infor-

mation. "So like a Romanoff. The late Czar was as bald as an egg."

After doing frank and impartial justice to the tea and confectionary, Miss Perry made her way to the Gypsy's Tent to have her palm crossed with silver.

"I see a tall dark man," said the gypsy.

"Ye—es," said Cheriton, "there is no doubt about him. But can you see an obese apoplectic-looking individual with a face remarkably like a turkey cock's?"

"I don't see him at present," said the gypsy.

"Are you quite sure?"

"I see a tall fair man who is young and handsome," said the gypsy. Jim Lascelles had just entered the tent with Miss Burden. "And I see a tall, dark woman, and, yes, a short fair man who is rich and rather stout, begins to emerge. He is rather old and appears to have been twice married——"

"Isn't it wonderful?" said Miss Burden in a voice of awe.

"Don't overlook the tallish dark fellow," said Cheriton rather anxiously.

"Yes—no—yes," said the gypsy, "and the tallish dark man and the tall fair man and the short stout man—really I don't remember reading a hand quite so complex as this."

"It was a tall fair man at Widdiford," said Miss Perry.

With a gesture of petulance the gypsy discarded the hand of that lady, solemnly declaring that she had spoiled everything.

"We were married at Widdiford," said Miss Perry, "and we lived happily ever afterwards, and we only paid a shilling."

"I am afraid shilling fortunes are seldom trustworthy," said Cheriton. "But I should like a little more information about that red-faced, apoplectic fellow."

"They might very easily marry," said the gypsy in a sinister manner.

"What rot!" muttered Jim Lascelles.

Cheriton seemed to think that the gypsy was confusing the short man with the tallish dark one.

The hand of Miss Burden was found to be less complex. In her horoscope there was only one man, and he was tall and dark.

"I think it is wonderful," she said, with a charming vibration in her voice.

The exigencies of the case made an early return to Hill Street necessary. Hurlingham was already forbidden for the rest of the season. It would not do, declared my lord, for Ranelagh also to be inhibited. Otherwise they would be compelled to restrict themselves to Burlington House, to Lord's and the Circus.

## CHAPTER XXI

### HIGH DIPLOMACY

LADY CREWKERNE'S interview with her lawyer did her no harm. Indeed, she seemed to sleep the sounder for it. All the same, the state of her health called for much vigilance on the part of Sir Wotherspoon Ogle. The skill of that eminent physician did not go without reward. Whatever the actual condition of the patient's vocal chords, they appeared to grow decidedly stronger, in spite of the fact that she was rigidly forbidden to use them.

"On no account, Lady Crewkerne," said Sir Wotherspoon with due professional gravity, "must you have recourse to your voice."

"You would like me to hold my tongue, I dare say," said the old woman, as hoarse as a raven. "If I did you would soon have the lid on my coffin."

Sir Wotherspoon was grieved and shocked.

Cheriton made three applications for admission to the presence, yet was thrice refused. On the other hand, his rival, George Betterton, continued in high favor. However, at the fourth attempt, on a Sunday morning, he obtained the *entrée*.

The occupant of the four-poster, supported by pillows, and embellished by the headdress and the famous Indian shawl, looked in the opinion of her visitor quite her old self. The eyes glittered as fiercely and as shrewdly as of yore; the curve of the nose was as macawlike as ever; while as for the stern jaw and the grim mouth, enough

hard sarcasm and unflinching force of character lurked around them to quell the vast majority of human kind.

Cheriton was a fop and a fribble, as all the world knew. Nevertheless, he was not easily abashed. He greeted the formidable Caroline with a coolness that served him well. Had he bated so much as an eyelid he would have received very short shrift this morning. For no matter what Sir Wotherspoon Ogle's opinion in regard to the mechanism that was buttoned into the linen band of the old woman's nightgown, there can be no doubt that, taken as a whole, the aged frame had gained alarmingly in bodily vigor by a week's detention within the precincts of the four-poster.

"How are you, Caroline?" said Cheriton with his habitual *empressement*.

"Worth a good many dead ones at present," said the old woman hoarsely.

"So I perceive," said her visitor with a little sigh.

Upon the counterpane lay Law's *Serious Call*. My lord took up the volume and ran his fingers thoughtfully through the leaves. On the first page in extremely large and decidedly juvenile characters was the inscription, "To dearest Aunt Caroline, with Fondest Love from her Affectionate Niece, Araminta."

"Caroline," said her visitor, "you must be a very happy woman to have a niece who takes such a practical interest in your future life, particularly at a time when the state of your health tends to make the question so interesting."

The occupant of the four-poster poised her chin, the incarnation of truculence. From under their bushy canopy the fierce eyes flashed with all the ruthlessness of their prime. She did not speak. Her silence rendered her the more formidable.

"In my humble judgment," said Cheriton, choosing

his words, "your affectionate niece has a charmingly frank and at the same time a deeply spiritual nature."

"Humph! The creature has as much spirituality as that bedpost."

"How can you be so obtuse, my dear Caroline? There is a vein of poetic ideality in our dear Miss Goose that makes one think of Saint Catherine of Siena."

"A vein of poetic fiddlestick! She has as much ideality as Ponto has. The only thing that interests either of them is their meals. In fact, I should say that Ponto has the better soul of the two. I sometimes suspect that dog of being an esoteric Buddhist in a reincarnation."

"Do you indeed?" said Cheriton. "Well, when Ponto presents his benefactress with a copy of *Amiel's Journal* I shall be only too happy to think you have grounds for your suspicion."

Cheriton continued to run fond fingers through the pages of Law's *Serious Call*.

"To my thinking," said he, "it was a deliciously frank nature that conceived the idea of presenting you with a work of this character."

"Cheriton, you are a trifler."

My lord shook his head. "Caroline," he said solemnly, "I don't wonder that your standard of things in general has gone awry."

"Why don't you?"

Cheriton indulged in a tragic gesture. "That man," he said.

"To whom do you refer?"

"I refer to the most dangerous man in London. The turkey-faced ruffian! He would undermine the moral code of Augustine himself."

"Happily," said the occupant of the four-poster, "I am not Augustine. As far as George is concerned, I stand where I was. Yet mark one thing, Cheriton—mark one

thing fully"—the quiescent lioness paused to unfurl the ominous jowl from the band of her nightgown—"I have a greater respect for George at this moment than I have ever had."

"Have you, though," said Cheriton meditatively.

He was a cool hand, but he was a little uneasy. The occupant of the four-poster marked the hint of disquietude with a grim satisfaction.

"Yes, Cheriton," said the raven's voice. "Whatever else he may be, George, in my opinion, is a practical man."

"Practical enough, I grant you, where his appetites are concerned."

"In my judgment," said the occupant of the four-poster, "it is precisely where his appetites are concerned that a man ought to be practical."

Cheriton agreed with reluctance.

"But there are people," said he, "to whom their open pursuit must always seem repulsive."

"There are many humbugs in the world," said Caroline Crewkerne. "Privately I think with George that matrimony ought to be placed upon a business basis."

Cheriton threw up his hands with carefully-simulated horror.

"No, Caroline, you have no soul. And yet your doctor says that during the past week you have been literally walking in the Valley of the Shadow."

"Ogle is a liar! He is thinking of his fee."

"For shame, Caroline! And you so near the Abyss!"

The occupant of the four-poster gave her headdress a tilt. From under the bushy eyebrows the gaze was that of a sybil. Cheriton began to wonder which card the old heathen was going to play.

Said the magisterial Caroline, "Are you aware, my friend, that all London is looking at you?"

“Ah, that is interesting.” Cheriton’s vanity was tickled. “One wonders what it sees.”

“It sees that your conduct is of doubtful propriety.”

“Does it, indeed!”

“I have reason to believe that George shares that opinion.”

“George!” exclaimed Cheriton with a noble rage. “George’s opinion! I’ll thank George to refrain from expressing an opinion about things which do not concern him.”

“He is a man of the world, at any rate.”

“George is a presumptuous fellow,” said Cheriton heatedly. “I should recommend him not to meddle with my private affairs. Let him attend to his own.”

“George is quite able to do that,” said Caroline with a sudden fall in her harsh voice that her old adversary knew to be decidedly dangerous. “In fact, I may tell you, Cheriton, that George has already placed his affairs upon a business basis.”

“Pray what do you mean, Caroline?”

“It is not so much a question of what I mean,” said the cryptical Caroline. “The question is, what do you mean, Cheriton?”

His lordship allowed Law’s *Serious Call* to fall upon the counterpane.

“I wish you wouldn’t indulge in riddles.”

“There is no mystery, my friend. I am going to say one thing to you quite plainly.”

“In my humble view, Caroline, you have always been inclined to err on the side of plainness.”

“George thinks, and I agree with him, that it is high time you disclosed your intentions.”

“My intentions!”

“Your intentions, Cheriton, with regard to my niece



Araminta. As she has been entrusted to my care, I feel that I have a right to know."

During the pause that followed the occupant of the four-poster adjusted her headdress to a style bearing an unconscious resemblance to a Sioux Indian. On his own part Cheriton assumed a port of dignified composure.

"I have no need to assure you, Caroline," said he impressively, "that my intentions, so far as your niece Miss Perry is concerned, are honorable in the highest degree."

"I am glad to have your assurance of that, Cheriton," said Caroline coolly. "George appeared to take a rather pessimistic view of them."

"I will thank you, Caroline, not to quote that man to me."

"My respect for George is increasing. He is a practical man, and in my judgment, Cheriton, that is where he has the advantage over you. For in my judgment you have never been that."

"Bah! An advantage one is only too ready to concede to anybody."

"If you'll take my advice, you won't concede it too readily. There is one question I must put to you." The occupant of the four-poster leaned forward beneath her canopy with an aspect of the most resolute sarcasm that ever adorned the human countenance. "Do you intend to marry the girl?"

The question in its ruthless directness was fired point-blank. Even Cheriton, with all his cynicism, was not prepared for anything quite so straight from the shoulder. Therefore he gave ground a little. He was inclined to hum and haw.

"Answer me, Cheriton," Caroline Crewkerne's wrinkled old lips curled in scorn. "Do you intend to marry my niece?"

Cheriton abated his glance. In the calm process of

thought he took the glass from his eye and examined it critically. He shifted his weight from his left leg to his right. Then he replaced the glass carefully and stuck his hands under his morning coat.

"Yes, Caroline, I do," he said with admirable composure.

"Very good, Cheriton," said the occupant of the four-poster with an extremely businesslike air. "I feel it to be my duty to inform you that George does also."

The blow was planted with all the skill of which the occupant of the four-poster was capable. Cheriton, however, had had time to foresee it. Therefore, although unable to evade its force, he received it staunchly.

"But that is impossible," he said, matter-of-factly.

"Why impossible?" asked Caroline with the amenity of one who holds the game in her hand.

"The most ill-assorted pair in England. Consider the incongruity of their tastes, their dissimilarity of outlook, their disparity in years. One shudders at the idea of such a ravishing creature marrying a man like George."

"Don't be a coxcomb, Cheriton. George is more eligible than you are."

"Upon my word, Caroline!"

"Socially, of course, George is the more important."

"That I take leave to doubt. In my humble opinion, a first-rate earl is of more account than a second-rate duke."

"That's as may be, Cheriton. But in any case, George has already placed the matter upon a business basis."

"Revolting!"

"Coxcombry!"

"Tell me what you mean precisely by a business basis."

"George has made a definite offer."

"To the girl?"

"Certainly not. Have you no sense of propriety?"

And I may say that as far as it goes the offer is a tolerably good one."

"You are quite sure that George means marriage?"

"Yes, George means marriage." Again the occupant of the four-poster assumed her "hanging-judge" demeanor.

"One can only say that the whole thing sounds very unlike him. I yield to none, Caroline, in whole-hearted admiration of your niece Araminta, considered æsthetically and as a work of nature, but you must not forget that she has not a sou, and she is of no particular family."

The occupant of the four-poster breathed slaughter and fire.

"She is a Wargrave."

"On the distaff side."

"More than good enough for either of you."

"Matter of opinion, Caroline, matter of opinion," said the mellifluous Cheriton.

"Your patent dates from a land-jobbing lawyer in the days of George the Second," said the occupant of the four-poster, whose headdress was performing strange feats. "As for the Bettertons—who, pray, are the Bettertons?"

"A truce to family pride. Let us get on with the business. I should be glad to know precisely what that sordid-minded man has offered."

"A settlement is, of course, a *sine qua non*."

"One fails to understand why it should be, seeing that the girl herself has not a penny."

"In my judgment, Cheriton, the creature's destitute condition renders a settlement the more imperative."

"But one may suppose you are prepared to do something, Caroline," said Cheriton with a severely practical air that was not quite in harmony with his vaunted altruism. "You are dooced rich, you know; you have not

a soul to leave your money to; and you can't take it with you."

"As far as aspirants to my niece's hand are concerned, my intentions with regard to her do not enter into the case. It is *their* intentions that are important. George has made a definite offer. Do you propose to better it?"

"What is George's offer?"

"George is prepared," said Caroline Crewkerne, who in spite of her "laryngitis" spoke with wonderful clearness and precision, "to make an ante-nuptial settlement upon my niece, Miss Perry, of five thousand a year and the dower house at Godalming."

Cheriton appeared to give ground a little.

"Have you that in writing, Caroline?" said he.

"I have. It is in the hands of my lawyer."

"If I may I should like very much to see it."

"You will see nothing, my friend. The question for you is, are you prepared to better George's offer?"

"It is so unlike George," said the incredulous Cheriton, "that one can hardly bring oneself to believe that he made it. He has treated none of his other women in that way."

"Doubtless they had nobody who knew how to handle him," said the occupant of the four-poster with a grim chuckle.

"Yes, Caroline, you have a good head," sighed my lord.

"Are you prepared, Cheriton, to better George's offer?"

"It requires consideration," said that idealist thoughtfully.

The old woman's upper lip took its famous and sinister double curl, while her headdress seemed to erect itself into a veritable panoply of derision.

"By all means, Cheriton, think it over. I will give you a week."

“Let us say a fortnight.”

“No, a week. A fortnight would not be fair to George.”

Marchbanks entered on tiptoe.

“Sir Wotherspoon Ogle, my lady.”

The negotiations were abruptly curtailed by the entrance of the eminent physician.

“How pleasant to see you looking so much improved!” said Sir Wotherspoon. “Complete rest of mind and body have done wonders for you.”

“Humph!” said the patient ungraciously.

“Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do!” Cheriton reflected as he took his leave.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A CONVERSATION AT WARD'S

CHERITON had food for thought. He had a constitutional objection to doing things under compulsion or in a hurry, but the tactics of Caroline Crewkerne were perilously like pointing a loaded pistol at one's head. My lord would have greatly preferred his sentiments in regard to Miss Perry to ripen at leisure. Let Nature take her course. Why force the fine flower of altruism or encumber it with the coarser growths of a sordid and grasping materialism.

His admiration for Caroline's niece was very great. It was shared, however, with many people. Her success had been a feature of the season. Cheriton was in no sense a modest man, and he could not help feeling that much of it was due to his brilliantly effective stage management. Certainly his zeal for Miss Perry's advancement had been largely inspired by vanity. From the first he had taken her under his wing, and much of the world's applause had been addressed to him personally on the strength of his "discovery."

He was a little *passé*, no doubt, to think of marriage. But quite a number of considerations spurred him on. Foremost was a genuine regard for the adorable Miss Goose. And the mere act of walking down Bond Street with her attracted an amount of notice that he was not accustomed to claim in his own person. But it appealed to him immensely. Besides, if commanding beauty and a unique personality did not themselves suffice, the fact

that a powerful rival was in the field was also a mighty stimulus.

He was fully determined not to be cut out by a man like George Betterton. Braced by this resolve, he sauntered down to his club to collect the gossip of the town. From the first he had had a lurking suspicion that George meant business; but unless Caroline played him false and his cause was already forsworn, he felt sure that he would prove more than a match for that clumsy fellow.

Could one count upon Caroline Crewkerne? That was rather a poser for his lordship. So well was he acquainted with the mental processes of that difficult old woman that he was quite sure he could not count upon her unless some very definite reason for her goodwill was advanced. If he really wanted Miss Perry, one thing was clear. He must prove himself the superior *parti*.

"George is a dangerous fellow," mused Cheriton on the way to his club. "A big-wig in his way, with his money and his Garter. Just the man to catch any woman. And if he wants a penniless parson's daughter he can afford to marry her. So be it! But while there is good manhood left in the country that ruffian shall not marry our adorable goose."

In the act of forming this resolution the *preux* chevalier turned the corner of Saint James' Street. Seated in the historic bow-window of Ward's was the object of his reflections. The Duke was reading *Horse and Hound*. As Cheriton ascended the club steps he marked his rival with the air of a satyr.

"There he is," he mused cheerfully. "He's got the head of a rocking-horse, thank God!"

Seen in profile, the purple and spectacled countenance, the loose cheeks and the bald head, without exactly meriting the strictures to which their owner was exposed, yet

bore a kind of wooden stupidity which gave ground for the portrait.

Cheriton, having observed that none of his fellow members were within earshot, advanced to the recess with an air of bonhomie that was totally lost upon George Betterton, who was not in the least susceptible to casual external influences.

“How are you, my dear fellow?” he said heartily.

“Pooty well for an old 'un,” said his Grace with the rough geniality he extended to all the world and his wife.

“Quite free of the old trouble, I hope?” said the solicitous Cheriton.

George gave an affirmative growl.

“As I haven't seen you about lately I was beginning to fear that you were laid up again.”

“No,” said George; and then, blunderer as he was, he walked into the trap. “Why,” he said, “I quite thought I saw you at Hill Street yesterday.”

“Hill Street!” Cheriton's tone was very innocent. “I was certainly there, but I didn't see you.”

“You were,” said George, “and so was I. We both called, but Caroline wouldn't have you up, as she thought the two of us might be a bit too much for her.”

“She erred on the side of caution. Half a hundred men like you and me would not prove too much for that old woman.”

“No, I dare say not.”

“In my humble opinion, if that old woman stays in bed much longer they'll not be able to keep the roof over her.”

“Remarkably vigorous mind for her years.”

“Her mind is far too vigorous.” Cheriton spoke as one who imparts a profound truth to an intellectual equal. “In my humble opinion, Caroline Crewkerne is a rather embarrassing phenomenon. She has the outlook of a Whig and the instincts of a Jesuit.”



"I dare say," grunted George, who felt that Cheriton, as usual, was becoming tedious. He showed a strong inclination to resume the study of the prices made at Tattersall's the week before last. Cheriton's next remark, however, did something to hold his interest.

"You remember that niece of hers?" said Cheriton, speaking in a rather aggrieved voice.

"Ye—es," said George, brightening perceptibly. "Gal with the ginger hair."

"Well now," said his friend impressively, "let me tell you something."

Cheriton looked round the room to make sure that he could not be overheard.

"When that girl came to London a few weeks ago she arrived at Hill Street in a turnout that any self-respecting butter-woman would disdain to go to market in. She was the most untutored child of Nature you ever saw."

George's nod expressed a growing interest in this piquant narrative.

"Well, Caroline was furious. You know, I dare say, the circumstances in which the girl came to Hill Street. Mind you, the facts of the case are highly creditable to Caroline. I have known her forty years, but it is the first spontaneous act of charity in which she has indulged in my experience. But when she saw what the wilds of Exmoor could produce, her first thought was to get rid of the creature. However, with infinite difficulty I managed to dissuade her. Father a parson, don't you know, without one shilling to rub against another, and a dooce of a long family to bring up."

"Ye—es," said George, nodding again.

"Knowing what the family circumstances were, it seemed only right to give the girl a chance. And then it suddenly occurred to me that the parson's rustic daughter

was by way of being a throw-back to Gainsborough's Duchess. Well, George, what do you think I did?"

George had no idea.

"I got hold of Duprez, the Paris milliner, and Pelissier, the woman from the bonnet shop in Grafton Street, and between us we managed to rig the girl up into quite a tolerable imitation of Grandmother Dorset. And as I felt an interest in the girl for her own sake, for she is a good, simple creature, I took her about to let her see something of London, so that she might get a few ideas about things in general."

George's nod expressed a continuing interest.

"I said to Caroline, my dear fellow"—Cheriton grew more confidential than ever—"if only you play your cards as well as you used to, with a bit of luck that girl might marry. She hasn't a penny and she is of no particular family, but when she has on a pretty frock she is not bad-looking in her rustic style. In fact, Caroline, I said, 'in my opinion she is just the sort of girl to catch one of these new men with money.'"

"Ye—es," said George.

"And now, my dear fellow, what do you suppose that old Jesuit does? I put it to you."

George had no idea.

"Finding the creature has not gone off in the way she ought to have, Caroline turns round on me."

"You!" George expressed a stolid surprise.

"Yes, my dear fellow, turns round on me, and has the effrontery to expect me—me, George—to marry her."

George indulged in a loud chuckle.

"What do you say to that, my dear fellow? Cool, eh?"

George turned over a page of *Horse and Hound* slowly and with gravity. Apparently he was not at all conscious that Cheriton was scrutinizing him narrowly.

"What do you say to it?"

"Well," said the heavy, solemn George at last, "I should say you were asking for it, Cheriton."

Cheriton was baffled. In the manner of the rejoinder not a hint of George's feelings was apparent.

"Asking for it!" Cheriton's indignation was pitched in a high key. "To say the least, it is a poor encouragement to a good heart."

"Well, you know, Cheriton," said George with a genial grunt and addressing himself to *Horse and Hound* in earnest, "you might do worse. Ginger-haired gal is not bad-lookin'!"

There was nothing more to be got out of George. Not only did Tattersall's sale list prove of absorbing interest, but fellow members began to encroach upon the privacy of the bow window. Among these was the bullet-headed marquis from Yorkshire.

"Give you a good sermon, Kendal?" said Cheriton affably.

"No," said the marquis slowly and with decision. "Too much up in the air for my taste."

"Up in the air!" said Cheriton. "I am surprised to hear you say that. I thought every parson in Europe had abandoned the up-in-the-air theory. They say the kingdom of heaven is within you these days, don't they?"

"Yes," said the marquis gravely, "and in my opinion and in the opinion of Maria they make a great mistake."

"Indigestion probably," said Cheriton with a little shrug and taking up the *Figaro*. "But if you will have your cooks from Yorkshire!"

"By the way," said Kendal, "I was told this morning that Caroline Crewkerne is not expected to recover."

"I am able to contradict that rumor," said Cheriton.

"Glad to hear it. Caroline is one of the old standards."

“A survivor of a darker age,” said Cheriton.

“I see that little bay horse of yours made a hundred and forty guineas,” said George from behind *Horse and Hound*.

“Yes,” said Kendal, “and was worth more.”

“Why did you part with him?”

“He tried to bite Priscilla.”

“Vice?”

“No, only playful.”

“Talking of Priscilla,” said Cheriton, “has that young chap painted her yet?”

“No,” said Kendal. “My wife has a fancy for Halpin.”

Cheriton shook his head sagely.

“You are making a mistake,” said he.

“Halpin is a good man, ain’t he?”

“Halpin is Halpin, of course; but this young fellow Lascelles is the coming man. He has done a wonderful portrait of Caroline Crewkerne’s niece.”

The marquis laughed in the broad Yorkshire manner.

“I suppose, Cheriton,” said he, “we must congratulate you.”

George laid down *Horse and Hound*. Cheriton, who seemed far more concerned with George’s behavior than with Kendal’s question, favored the former with a gesture of humorous despair.

“I believe,” he said to Kendal, “that your regular church goers go to church mainly to keep abreast of the times.”

“There’s no denying,” said Kendal, with a wink at George, “that we manage to do that.”

“Well, my friend,” said Cheriton, “there is such a thing as your regular church goers getting a little in front of the times.”

“People seem to think she is the most beautiful girl in England. Priscilla is very jealous.”

"If one were half as handsome as Priscilla," said the discreet Cheriton—for personal beauty was hardly Priscilla's strong point—"one would not need to be jealous of a poor parson's daughter."

"Funny cattle, y' know. You young bachelors have got to find that out. What do you say, George?"

George, whose experience of the sex was extensive and peculiar, gave a solemn grunt.

"Anyhow," said Cheriton in the bounty of his nature, "Lascelles is your man. Tell your wife I say so."

When Cheriton came to reflect upon George's attitude, that is as far as he was able to discern it, he felt that the position of affairs hardly called for immediate action. Still, his interview that morning with Caroline Crewkerne had the effect of crystallizing his ideas. He had now definitely made up his mind that George Betterton should not lead the adorable Miss Perry to the altar.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### MUFFIN MAKES HER APPEARANCE AT PEN-Y-GROS CASTLE

**I**T was now July, and in spite of Goodwood and Lord's and a constant succession of parties, Miss Perry remained faithful to The Acacias. Her attendance at the wooden structure in the small Laxton back garden was not absolutely necessary, because the picture was in quite an advanced stage, but there can be no question that her presence was a great aid to the artist. As a rule, Lord Cheriton felt it to be his duty to accompany her on these pilgrimages. With the disinterested benevolence for which he was known, he feared lest the mazes of traffic in which the vast metropolis abounded should overwhelm that ingenuous but charming child of Nature. Moreover, he seemed to find Mrs. Lascelles a singularly agreeable companion.

While the great things of art were toward across the garden Mrs. Lascelles and Lord Cheriton would sit in the tiny drawing-room with the French window open to the grass plot and the fierceness of the obtrusive Laxton sun mitigated by a sunblind, striped green and red. Here in a couple of wicker-work chairs with ingenious arrangements for the feet they could recline, with half an eye upon the wooden structure at the other side of the lawn, where the wonderful Miss Perry was just visible in chiaroscuro through the open door. They discoursed of the golden days when Cheriton was a younger son, and at the Embassy at Paris, and used to wear a stripe down the leg of his trousers.

The world itself was younger in those days and giants lived in it. That writing fellow who used to swagger at the play in a coat of plum-colored velvet and a yellow dicky; and the dandies, the poets, the painters, the musicians, the men in diplomacy and politics, the gay, careless, brilliant, cosmopolitan society that thronged the French capital before the Fall—yes, those were the days to live in and to remember! But where were they now? Where were the snows of the year before last?

Let us drink of the cup, for we know not what the morrow holds for us, was the burden of Cheriton's reflections. He had seen the clumsy, hulking Germans at Versailles in '71 and he had seen the mutilated city after the peace.

"War is so *bête*," he said. "And everything is that makes us unhappy. I don't believe that any good thing ever sprang out of misery. All the things that are really worth while are wrought of happiness. I am sure, Mrs. Lascelles, it gave you enormous pleasure to write the first chapter of your novel."

Jim's mother blushed a little. She had been prevailed upon to read her simple and unpretending narrative of life as she saw it, which could find no publisher, because "there was not enough in it" for the public taste.

"We must respect the public," said Cheriton. "And of course we must respect those who diagnose its needs. But what a joy it must have been to you to compose your little prelude to, shall I say, the works of Stendhal!"

"*Mon pauvre Arrigo Beyle!*" said Jim's mother with a deepening of color that was really most becoming.

There was a perceptible movement in the wooden structure. A form divinely tall and correspondingly fair emerged upon the grass plot. It was accompanied by a stalwart, velvet-coated cavalier.

“A short interval for strawberries and cream,” Jim announced.

“Most rational, my dear Lascelles,” said a voice lazily musical from the depths of the wicker chair. “As I was observing to your mother, the great things of art demand an atmosphere of spontaneous gladness in which to get themselves created. Strawberries and cream by all means. Do not spare our national delicacy if you wish to get a final and consummate glow upon your masterpiece.”

The attention of Miss Perry was fully engaged by the rare display upon the tea table of the national delicacy in question.

“Aren’t they beauties?” she said thrillingly. “I am sure Muffin has picked the biggest in the garden; and when I wrote to her I specially told her not to.”

“Among the happy few,” said Cheriton, “whom one particularly desires to meet in the Elysian fields, my dear Miss Goose, is your sister Muffin.”

“She is too, too sweet,” said Miss Perry with enthusiasm. “Aren’t they beauties? I am sure you would like her so much.”

After liberal and copious refreshment—the afternoon was indeed very hot—Miss Perry and Jim Lascelles returned to the service of art. Jim’s mother was prevailed upon to open the little rosewood piano. She played Brahms. Her touch, in the ear of her audience, was deliciously sensitive. She promised to accompany my lord on the Friday following to the Opera to hear Calvé. They discussed the theater and grew enthusiastic over the artless witchery of Duse as *Mirandola*.

“And soon, my dear Mrs. Lascelles,” said Cheriton with his paternal air, “you will be off to the sea, no doubt.”

“If,” said Jim’s mother hopefully, “the little study of



the Tuscan peasant woman in the field of olives finds a purchaser."

"One feels sure it will," said Cheriton with perhaps a better-grounded faith.

Cheriton was justified of it, however. A few days later Jim Lascelles contrived to sell that not specially significant little work for forty pounds. In his own judgment and in that of others this sum was every penny of what it was worth. It was so obviously a picture in which he was seeking the right way, in that carelessly happy era before the right way came to him so miraculously.

The sale of the Tuscan peasant woman in the field of olives was indeed providential, for Jim himself had abandoned all hope of the sea for that year. Yet neither he nor his mother was altogether surprised that a corner was found for her in one of the minor rooms at Cheriton House.

"It's a great bargain," said Mrs. Lascelles. "Really she is worth so much more."

"A modest fiver represents her merits," said Jim, who was without illusions upon the subject.

Nevertheless Jim and his mother proposed to spend a whole month in Normandy upon the proceeds of the sale. Cheriton, who had inherited a little suppressed gout along with the ancestral acres, made his annual pilgrimage to Harrogate to drink the waters, and the Hill Street *ménage* was removed to a dilapidated fortress in Wales. And it was to this retreat, by a signal act of grace, of which few would have suspected its authoress to be capable, that Muffin was summoned from Slocum Magna to spend a fortnight with her sister "who, all things considered, had been a good girl."

When Araminta communicated this glad news to Tobias she wept large round tears of delight. That stay

of her solitude had, by the guilty connivance of Miss Burden, been provided during the second week of his sojourn in London with a local habitation more hygienic and commodious than a wicker basket.

Muffin arrived at Pen-y-Gros Castle on a sultry August afternoon in a rather antiquated fly which took an hour to crawl from the railway station at Dwygyfy Junction, or words to that effect. It appeared that the train was due to arrive at that center of civilization at seven o'clock the previous evening, but for some mysterious reason did not get there until the next day. At least, according to Muffin's thrilling narrative of her adventures upon the Cambrian Railway, at a quarter to eleven the previous night she had found herself at a place called Llan-something, where they have the mountains, with only four shillings and ninepence in her chain purse, together with a return ticket from Dwygyfy and a canary in a wicker cage, which she had brought from Slocum Magna for Aunt Caroline.

However, "all's well that ends well," as Shakespeare says. Muffin accepted the situation in the philosophical spirit for which she had already gained a reputation. She curled herself up on three chairs in the first-class waiting room at the railway station at Llan-something, with Polly's luggage-basket for her pillow and the canary by her side, and she awoke just in time to catch the train to Dwygyfy Junction about noon the next day.

Muffin's hair was not quite so yellow as her sister's, her eyes were not quite so blue, her appetite was not quite so big, her physique was hardly so overpowering. And if her speech and manner had a little less originality, her nature was equally docile and responsive. When Muffin arrived in triumph, wearing her wonderful adventures like a heroine in a romance, Aunt Caroline was in her boudoir. In a former and more warlike epoch it had

been the armory, but it was now transformed by the art of Waring and Maple into a most comfortable sanctuary where an old *dévoté* could tell her beads. Not that the occupant of the boudoir was thus engaged when Araminta led her sister proudly by the hand, canary and all, into the presence of this august and formidable relation.

"Aunt Caroline, this is Muffin!" announced Miss Featherbrain all in one breath. "Isn't she a sweet?"

The first thing Aunt Caroline did was to put on her spectacles. But there was something about Muffin that disarmed her. Whether it was Muffin herself or her famous mauve frock, which although in its third season and decidedly rumped owing to long exposure on the Cambrian Railway, was certainly very becoming, or whether it was the canary, or her charming docility, or her frank simplicity, it would be difficult to say, but Aunt Caroline accepted the present and a most enthusiastic embrace in the spirit in which they were given.

"I have brought you this, Aunt Caroline," said Muffin, "because you have been so kind to Araminta and because it is so dear of you to have me."

"Thank you, my dear," said Aunt Caroline.

Aunt Caroline actually said, "My dear!"

It may have been that recent illness had lowered her vitality, yet it is hard to believe that such was really the case, for she was still a very resolute-minded old woman. But Miss Burden was amazed that she should indulge in such a warmth of expression. Ponto was too. Indeed, he appeared to resent it, for he sat up on his tail and looked daggers at the canary.

In every way Muffin's fortnight was a great success. She took the frankest pleasure in ascending mountains, in bestriding waterfalls, in leaping chasms, in descending precipices, and in tearing her frock on the slightest

possible pretext. Not her mauve, of course. The *pièce de résistance* of her extremely limited wardrobe was kept in reserve for high day and holy days. But she gave up the golden hours to the sheer delight of soaking her shoes and stockings in sloughs and watercourses which an unerring instinct enabled her to find in the most unlikely places; in rending her garments—second best, of course, so they really did not matter; in tearing her fingers upon the briars and boulders and furze-bushes; and in using the brand new straw hat the general outfitter at Slocum Magna had supplied her with for the sum of one shilling and eleven pence three farthings—there is only one price for straw hats at Slocum Magna—to convey rare ferns and far-sought specimens of the fauna and flora of the neighborhood.

Muffin was a curiously learned creature. She could tell who was the lawful owner of the pink egg with brown spots or the gray egg with cerise ones. She could point out the tracks of the weasel; she could see where a squirrel lurked among the foliage when the ordinary person would have been baffled completely. She was familiar with the habits and appearance of the stoat. Every tree and bush enabled her to unfold her knowledge. Not only did it embrace each living object, but also she had a passion for collecting every wayside flower and every herb that grew.

Her fund of information and her desire for more was not confined to dry land merely. In the numerous rills and small lakes in which the mountains abounded she spent many choice hours. Sometimes she removed her stockings and shoes; sometimes she did not. It depended upon whether she happened to remember these trammels to an inquiring mind before wading forth in search of trout or minnows or mere botanical knowledge. However, as became an acknowledged leader of fashion at Slocum

Magna, she generally contrived in some sort to kilt her dress.

In all undertakings of this character, whether by flood or field, Muffin was preëminent. But her sister Goose was a very willing and by no means inefficient lieutenant. Of course, one so accomplished as Muffin despised her attainments really. For instance, Goose was never quite clear as to which was a weasel and which was a stoat, and whether a plover made a whirr with its wings like a partridge, and which kind of fish it was for which herons had such a weakness; but Goose, although "rather a silly," was brimming with zeal and docility. Indeed, docility was her strong point. She was incapable of questioning the most arbitrary command of her natural superior.

Elizabeth was Muffin's name in baptism, and that, of course, was the name Aunt Caroline called her by. From the very first her august relation was inclined to view her favorably. Why she had done so baffled all who had expert knowledge of that old woman's character. She may have felt instinctively that there was something in Elizabeth. If that was the case, her instinct did not lead her astray.

There was certainly no guile in Muffin. But she had a way with her. She was a very handsome creature, although whether she was of a style to take the town as her sister had is perhaps a matter for conjecture. But for some reason Aunt Caroline took to her at once. She even deigned on fine mornings to accompany Elizabeth into the woods that enfold Pen-y-Gros Castle on every side, walking quite nimbly with the aid of her stick and with Ponto waddling beside her. She would endure Elizabeth's discourse upon the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field, and she would even go the length of taking personal charge of the specimens Elizabeth chose of the

flora of the district. And the manner in which Elizabeth navigated the lake at the foot of the mountains or the stream behind the castle filled her with amusement.

Two days before the fortnight was at an end Aunt Caroline did an unprecedented thing. She invited Muffin to stay a fortnight longer. Muffin crowed with delight when she received the invitation. She adored her sister Goose. Each had brought up the other, and neither had a thought which the other did not share. And in her fearless and impulsive way Muffin had formed in her own mind an ardently idealist picture of her formidable relation. Neither good report nor ill could possibly disturb it.

“The girl has sense,” said Aunt Caroline to her gentlewoman on the day the edict was issued that Elizabeth was to remain a fortnight longer at Pen-y-Gros Castle. “She is like what I was at her age. I think George Betterton ought to see her. Bring me some ink and a pen with a broad point.”

There and then the old woman composed a letter for the benefit of the Duke of Brancaster in a hand that was remarkably firm and full of character.

*Pen-y-Gros Castle, North Wales,*

*25th August, 190—.*

*Dear George,—If you are returned from Homburg, come and spend a week-end here. Wales is looking very well just now and the lake is full of trout. I should like you to have your revenge at piquet.*

*Believe me,*

*Very sincerely yours,*

*CAROLINE CREWKERNE.*

No sooner had this letter gone forth than the Fates themselves began to take an active interest in affairs. In

that particular corner of the Welsh principality the air grew charged with magnetism.

The letter to George Betterton had scarcely been posted an hour when a communication bearing the Harrogate postmark was delivered to the Countess of Crewkerne, Pen-y-Gros Castle. It said:—

*My dear Caroline,—Having effected my annual cure, and feeling in consequence immeasurably the better able in mind and body to cope with the things of this world, I venture to propose myself as a week-end guest in your Welsh fastness. You will be interested to learn that I have given a certain matter the most anxious consideration, which is of course demanded by its highly critical nature. I am now in a position to make a definite offer provided there has been no foreclosure.*

*I remain, my dear Caroline,*

*Always yours,*

CHERITON.

Having read this letter twice very carefully, the recipient proceeded to tear it into small pieces. There was an ominous light in her eye.

“Humph!” said she. “I am by no means sure, my friend, that you have not overstayed your market.”

All the same, the second communication did not appear wholly to displease the person to whom it was addressed.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### EPISODE OF A FRENCH NOVEL AND A RED UMBRELLA

**I**T was in the middle of Saturday afternoon that Cheriton arrived at Pen-y-Gros Castle by the station fly from Dwygyfy Junction. George Betterton had arrived at the same hour the previous afternoon and by the same medium of travel. Cheriton was received by his hostess without any excess of cordiality. Her demeanor implied that those who presumed to try a fall with her did so at their peril.

The other members of the party were in the woods, and after Cheriton had taken some slight refreshment, the August evening being very beautiful, Miss Burden and he went to join them. The party consisted merely of George Betterton, the fair Araminta and the accomplished Elizabeth. Miss Burden had been strictly enjoined not to disclose the presence of either of the newcomers.

“How is our delectable Miss Goose?” said Cheriton poetically. “Transformed I am sure into a woodland creature or a spirit of the mountains.”

A quarter of a mile or so along the wooded path which led from the Castle to the wild hills was a shallow lake. Formed by a number of tiny streams that trickled down from the mountains, an artist could hardly do less than erect his easel in this picturesque place. It was indeed an ideal spot, in which Nature attained to a signal majesty. The August evening matched it. And in the middle distance hardly a cloud ringed the noble head of Gwydr.



A glance in passing at the artist's canvas proved to Cheriton and Miss Burden that the painter was not really so much absorbed in the scenery as he ought to have been. It seemed that a youthful, yellow-haired, blue-eyed nymph, whose physical proportions were yet not exactly those of a fairy, was standing barefooted in the lake. Her dress, which was torn in at least twenty-four places, was kilted up just out of reach of the water. In one hand she held a collection of the fauna and flora of Lake Dwygy; by means of the other she was diligently adding to their number. The yellow hair was tumbled about her extremely frank and sunburned countenance; the sleeves of a sorely rent and bedraggled garment were tucked up to the elbows; and a remarkably characteristic form of headgear, preserving the outward appearance of a cucumber basket, sagged about her ears in a preposterously becoming manner.

Cheriton was rather near-sighted. Therefore the error into which he fell was not unnatural.

"A naiad, I perceive," said he with his great air.

Muffin was not at all abashed by the courtliness of my lord. She made a sort of courtsey, whose quaintness, dignity, grace and simplicity had quite an eighteenth-century effect. Unfortunately, the performance involved the hem of her garments in the waters of Lake Dwygy.

"I am Muffin," said she, as though she took a simple pride in that fact. "Did you think I was Goose?"

"A thousand pardons, my dear Miss Muffin," said Cheriton, although it was tolerably clear that neither Miss Muffin nor himself felt that an apology was demanded by the circumstances.

"They call me Muffin, you know," said that artless person, wringing the water out of her skirts with wonderful insouciance. "But my name is Elizabeth really. You are Lord Something, are you not?"

“My name is Cheriton,” said that peer, scrutinizing the naiad with a cool and complacent eye.

“It is so dear of you to be so good to Goose.”

“My dear young lady!”

“Lord Cheriton is so good to everybody,” said a manly, pleasant voice. “But unfortunately he is ruining my picture.”

Cheriton turned to confront Jim Lascelles.

“Why, Lascelles, my dear fellow, pray what are you doing here? Isn’t your place in Normandy with your mother?”

“She is here,” said Jim. “We came on Wednesday.”

“Either this is a very singular coincidence or you are making uncommonly rapid strides in your art.”

“Coincidence it is not, sir. We spent three delightful weeks in Normandy, and then the scenery began to get flat and the inhabitants primitive and angular. And as Borrow says that there are mountains in Wales and that its inhabitants are noted for their picturesqueness, we really felt that a week here would not be wasted.”

“Lascelles,” said his patron gravely, “I may not live to see it, but it is clear to my mind that one day you will be President of the Royal Academy.”

“My mother seems to think so too,” said Jim modestly.

That lady was to be seen coming round the lake towards the easel. Quagmires abounded, but she picked her way from stone to stone in the daintiest manner. Jim felt quite proud of her. In her cool, green frock she looked most attractive. She carried a novel and a red umbrella. As soon as Muffin saw her she waded shorewards to meet her.

Cheriton’s gaze was long and particular.

“Upon my word,” said he, “they appear to grow goddesses at Slocum Magna.”

Mrs. Lascelles' greeting of my lord was very cordial indeed.

"A pleasure one was far from expecting," said he, bowing over her hand.

"I am not to be censured, I hope, for urging my gifted son to follow the bent of his genius?"

"By no means," said Cheriton. "If he really felt that the Welsh mountains and their fair denizens were calling him, it is most right. Velasquez would not have been Velasquez had he not obeyed the call to Italy."

"That Goose is to blame," said Jim's mother severely. "She must write to say that they had got Muffin at Pen-y-Gros, as well as the mountains. He gave up painting his Normandy peasant girls on the day he received the letter."

"Miss Muffin," said my lord, "allow me to ask one question. Have you brought your mauve frock?"

"Oh yes," said Muffin. "But it is not good for water."

"Water, I presume, is not good for it."

Muffin proceeded to wring a little more moisture out of her nether garments. She gave them an additional kilt and began to come ashore.

"Keep in," cried Jim in a tone that made the mountains echo. "Keep those Foot Pieces covered, or you will ruin everything."

"You have an eye for the picturesque," said Cheriton, turning archly to Jim's mother. "When you read the second chapter of your novel I ventured to remark upon it. Unfortunately, my own power of vision is so limited that I don't always know good scenery when I see it. Those tall things are mountains, are they not?"

"We have the authority of Borrow that they are, I believe," was the demure reply.

"Capital," said my lord. "As our presence here may interfere with the nice conduct of a masterpiece, do you

mind showing me how to walk upon them? It is reckoned a good thing, I believe, to be able to say one has walked upon the mountains."

Accompanied by the French novel and the red umbrella, Cheriton picked his way along the margin of Lake Dwygy in patent leather boots with boxcloth uppers. It was a beauteous evening, calm and free. Not a sound was to be heard except the muffled murmur of the tiny wavelets washing the pebbles upon which they walked. Occasionally they heard a wood pigeon call from the dense black mass behind them, embowering the hamlet of Pen-y-Gros. Once Mrs. Lascelles thought she detected the pipe of the curlew. Facing them was the giant Gwydr, with the August sunset beginning to peer over his shoulder. His majesty was crowned with a glory that was older than he.

The naiad and the Painter's easel were hidden now by a bend of the lake. They were out of sight and out of hearing. The red umbrella came to rest on a large and smooth fragment of slate, raised in such a manner that it formed an ideal seat for two persons. Two admirers of Nature's majesty gazed around them at the immensity of things. Neither spoke for a little while. It may have been awe that enfolded them, or it may have been a slight fatigue. For at least all experience tends to show that French novels, red umbrellas and patent leather boots with boxcloth uppers are more susceptible to the latter emotion than they are to the former. Still, it is not to be denied that Cheriton sighed profoundly.

"If one were that fellow Rousseau," said he, "one would want to sit down and write something."

"Doubtless one would have done so," said the owner of the red umbrella, "had one been Rousseau."

She sat down with her French novel on the smaller half of the fragment of slate. She looked deliciously cool and

trim in her green linen frock, embellished by a hat with a wide brim plaited by a Breton peasant woman the previous summer. It had a piece of *crêpe* twisted round it. Did she know that she was looking well, or had she persuaded herself that she was wholly absorbed in high thoughts about Nature?

“Or if one were Wordsworth one would feel the same possibly,” said the fair inhabitant of the green frock.

*Pour encourager mitor?* Who can say? The emotions of a French novel, a red umbrella and a green linen frock with a twist of blue *crêpe* are so complex. Nature is complex also. Gwydr was straight before them with the sun dying upon his left shoulder. His lesser brethren were already veiled in shadow. The lake had the luster of a dark jewel; the sky was opalescent; and scarcely two hundred yards away, behind a row of bowlders, the great things of art were toward.

The wearer of the patent leather boots sat down gracefully upon the larger half of the slate, after dusting it carefully with a yellow silk handkerchief.

“Yes,” said he, “had one been Rousseau one would have sat here and have written about Nature. But had one been Wordsworth one would have sat here and thought about Nature. There is a difference.”

Mrs. Lascelles agreed that there was.

“I wonder,” said she, “if Nature holds an opinion about us? When one finds her like this, one feels that she must be indifferent to everything.”

“That weird fellow Gautier might have agreed with you, ‘Ouf!’ he used to say, ‘Nature reminds me of your Shakespeare. Every day she makes a new masterpiece. And then she says, ‘Ouf! it doesn’t interest me,’ and makes another.’ ”

“Heedless of its destiny.”

“Rightly, I think. A masterpiece can always take care

of itself. Can you guess what Beyle would have done had he sat here?"

"Smoked a cigarette."

"Precisely. He was so rational. Will you try one?"

Cheriton offered his case. Mrs. Lascelles chose one with the guaranty that it was very mild. They began to smoke.

There would have been silence but for the fowls of the air. Jim's mother thought that she heard again the pipe of the curlew. The sun nestled a little closer to the giant's shoulder.

"A penny for your thoughts."

Jim's mother was perceptibly startled.

"I was thinking—I was thinking about my son."

"One had guessed it."

"Really!"

"By the look in your eyes."

"I am so anxious about his future," she said with simplicity and solicitude. As she did this Cheriton took occasion to observe that her eyes were gray. Her face did not obey the regular canons of beauty, its features were perhaps a little haphazard; but it was a face of animation and fine sense. Cheriton, who plumed himself upon being something of a connoisseur of the human countenance, felt that there was a great deal in it.

"Surely," said he, "such a future can take care of itself."

"I will tell you something, Lord Cheriton," said Jim's mother with great earnestness. "There is a wretched girl." In the gray eyes was a look of dismay.

"The dooce!"

"He can think of nothing else. Really, one hardly knows what will be the end of it all."

"I hope you approve."

"She hardly belongs to the region of practical politics,

I am afraid. It would not be fair. I have been foolish and weak." Cheriton seemed to hang on her words. Feminine humility is very pleasant to some people. "You see, she meant so much to Jim that at first I had not the courage to look the facts in the face. Yet now one has done so, I am afraid it is too late to undo the mischief."

Cheriton seemed to cock his ears at the word.

"He has asked her to marry him and she has consented."

"Capital!"

"No, Lord Cheriton," said Jim's mother with a little catch in her voice, "it is very far from being that. It is not in the least right that they should marry. Nor is it right that he should have asked her."

In a subtle way, so fine are the gradations of human vanity, Cheriton felt himself to be honored by the almost tragic vehemence of Jim's mother. Her tone was full of emotion. Had the gray eyes been accustomed to tears there is little doubt they would have shed them.

"I smiled at first. Perhaps one encouraged him a little. One felt it might help his art."

"Ah!" murmured Cheriton, fixing his eyeglass upon Gwydr.

"One didn't realize the danger."

Cheriton continued to regard Gwydr most sagaciously.

"It was very wicked."

"My dear Mrs. Lascelles, do not let us put it higher than imprudent." Cheriton bestowed a paternal glance at the picture of distress seated by his side. "You ventured to play with a barrel of gunpowder and a lighted torch and you found them combustible."

"They are hopelessly in love."

"Both of 'em!"

"She is quite as bad as he. Girls are such stupid creatures."

"I have always found them so."

"The absurd creature ought to have seen from the first that a struggling artist cannot possibly marry her."

"May I ask why not?"

"She has been the success of the London season."

Cheriton became quite grave.

"Seriously, Mrs. Lascelles," he said, "do you assure me that this young woman is too good for your son?"

Jim's mother had to confess that such was not quite the case.

"Quite so," said Cheriton. "That is the point. Can the mother of any man allow that any girl is too good for him? Besides, if girls will be so stupid they must take the consequences. It is your duty to see that your son marries her."

"Do you really think it is?"

"You know it is, Mrs. Lascelles," said Cheriton almost sternly. "And you know that you will. It is the least a woman and a mother can do in the circumstances."

The mother of Jim Lascelles sighed deeply.

"Yes, Lord Cheriton," said she, "I am afraid you are right."

The gray eyes were fixed upon Gwydr. But Gwydr appeared to frown upon them.

Mrs. Lascelles and Lord Cheriton sat a long time on the slab of slate by the edge of Lake Dwygy. The sun drooped lower on Gwydr's left shoulder and the shadows crept down from the formidable chasm of the Devil's Footstool and across the black tinted water. Suddenly round a buttress of rock a punt glided into view. It was propelled by a pole and contained two persons.

The foremost of these, who stood in the bows manipulating the pole, was a blue-eyed yellow-haired Amazon. Bare-armed and bare-headed, her cheeks were gay with color, her voice with laughter. Untrammelled freedom



and the joy of living were to be seen in every line of that ample form. Beside her was a Homburg hat with a Guards' ribbon.

"That man!" exclaimed the male occupant of the slab of slate.

Clearly such an apparition was unlooked for by the author of the exclamation. If his tone and manner were a true index to his feelings, the arrival of George Betterton was not at all welcome.

His Grace came ashore with an ample sense of responsibility befitting his years and degree. He handed Miss Perry out of the punt with quite an air of ceremony, and insisted upon taking a hand in fixing the boat to its moorings. After removing his hat and mopping his brow he proceeded to survey Nature in her magnificence and her immensity. Then he gazed up at the daughter of Nature who appeared to be modeled on lines very similar.

"By the way," said he, "what time is dinner?"

"It isn't until half-past eight," said a low-pitched, far-reaching voice which had a mournful music of its own. "Isn't it late?"

"That man is a barbarian," said Cheriton to Mrs. Lascelles.

"And what of the other?"

"She is a goddess."

"Then she must be a barbarian too. There never was a goddess who was not a barbarian, was there?"

There were things in the punt, it appeared. To wit, a rod and tackle and a basket containing a very tolerable capture of trout.

"Aren't they beauties!" cried Miss Perry as she came ashore with the basket. "If I run with them straight to the cook perhaps we might have some for dinner."

The Amazon, surprisingly fleet of foot, was proceeding to put this design into execution when she came full upon

Mrs. Lascelles and Lord Cheriton. The unexpected presence of the latter seemed to give her enormous pleasure.

"*How* nice it is that you have come!" she proclaimed with slow breathlessness. "Muffin is here. *Have* you seen her? Isn't she *too* sweet? And these trout are beauties, aren't they? Gobo caught seven and I caught two. I will just run with them to the cook and then I will find Muffin."

Before it was possible to frame a fitting reply Miss Perry went on to the Castle in the manner of a heavy-footed yet distinctly swift-moving whirlwind.

"The ridiculous creature!" laughed Jim's mother.

"Atalanta develops now she is in her native element," said my lord.

George Betterton having bestowed a few final touches upon the moorings of the punt came up along the pebbles. He carried the rod and tackle. His tread was heavy and he was blowing like a grampus with his exertions. The presence of Cheriton did not surprise him at all. With the reserve of true Britons they greeted one another.

"Fine evenin'," said George.

"Fine evening," said Cheriton.

"For fish," said Jim's mother, "they seem to have bitten quite wonderfully."

"Caught fourteen," said George. "They average two pound apiece if they average an ounce."

"I understood Araminta to say you had caught nine," said the severely literal Mrs. Lascelles.

"Fourteen," said George with the air of a man who does not brook contradiction lightly. "Where's the gal got to?"

"Little Miss Tucker would like trout for her supper," said Cheriton. "There she goes. Leaps the bowlders like a chamois, by gad!"

"I tell you what, Cheriton," said George with an air of information, "that young gal can handle a punt with the best of 'em. Knows how to cast a fly too. Very sure hand. Uncommon smart gal at fishin'."

"You surprise me," said Cheriton. "Three minnows in a net one would expect to be the limit of her talent in the art of Piscator."

"There is a charming little trout stream behind the Vicarage at Slocum Magna," said Mrs. Lascelles.

"Seen her sister, Cheriton?" inquired George. "They call her Crumpet. Smart young gal."

"Muffin, my dear fellow, Muffin," said his friend in a tone of pained expostulation.

"Smart as paint," said George, with a perilous approach to enthusiasm. "Makes her own flies and tackle, and can find as much bait in a quarter of an hour as will last for a week."

"The merits of a good upbringing," said Cheriton, rising slowly from the slab of slate, "are not easily to be over-estimated."

Mrs. Lascelles also rose. All three strolled by the edge of the lake until they came upon the painter and his easel. Jim was doing his best with what remained of the daylight. There was still a glow about Gwydr's left shoulder which was reflected upon the canvas. Muffin was seated on the pebbles complacently putting on her shoes and stockings.

"Did you catch anything?" she demanded of the bearer of the rod and tackle.

"Sixteen."

"How splendid! Do let me see them."

"You will have to wait until dinner, my dear. They have gone to the pot."

"Good progress, Lascelles?" inquired Cheriton, conducting an amused examination of Jim's labors.

"I think I have done a fair day's work, sir," said Jim, packing up his tools.

"Yes, I think you have. I must have the refusal of this for Cheriton House. By the way, have you heard anything from my friend Kendal?"

"I am to go to Yorkshire in the autumn to paint Lady Priscilla."

"Excellent! And remember, if Kendal is to respect your art your price must be not a penny less than five hundred guineas."

As the party turned away from the lake a dryad emerged from the wood breathless and bareheaded. She had three trout in a basket.

"It will be all right," she announced. "We are going to have them for dinner. There are six, one apiece for everybody except Ponto, and Miss Burden thinks trout are not good for him. And I've brought three for you, dear Mrs. Lascelles."

"Then you are a very noble girl," said Jim's mother, "and I highly appreciate your act of self-sacrifice."

By this time Muffin had resumed her shoes and stockings and had risen from the pebbles. Her sister took her by the hand and led her forward with an air of the most admirable simplicity.

"Lord Cheriton," said she, "this is Muffin."

"I am already honored," said my lord, "by an acquaintance which I shall strive to cultivate."

## CHAPTER XXV

### PARIS ON MOUNT IDA

**M**ISS PERRY insisted on conducting Jim and his mother to their lodgings, which were at a small cottage in Pen-y-Gros hamlet. She was afraid they might get lost in the wood. Jim's mother took the trout within, while Jim conducted Miss Perry back to the gate of Pen-y-Gros Castle. It seemed that he was haunted by the fear that in the gloom she might take the wrong turning.

The Wargrave coat of arms was emblazoned on a stone pillar at the castle entrance. They leaned against it. The evening shadows were fast blotting out Gwydr and his brethren.

"Goose Girl," said Jim mournfully, "we are in pretty deep water, you and I, aren't we?"

"It will be all right, Jim," said Miss Perry cheerfully. "You are sure to get rich painting all these pictures. It is a splendid idea to paint Muffin. Her picture will be worth a lot of money. And I am sure when you are rich Aunt Caroline will let me marry you."

Jim shook his head sorrowfully.

"Chaps don't often get rich at my trade. And when they do, it doesn't happen all at once. Now suppose, Goose Girl, I did not get rich. Suppose I was only just able to rub along as I do now, what would you say then?"

"I should like it all the better," said Miss Perry with conviction, "because then I shouldn't have to have a

maid. A maid loses her temper, you know, if you put things in your hat or you get mud on your frock or you get up too early."

"But don't you see, you Goose," said Jim, "that you have such grand prospects, and that it would be such a great thing for the family if you married a swell."

"Would it, Jim?" said Miss Perry reluctantly.

"Of course it would, you Goose."

Miss Perry indulged in silence and reflection.

"Perhaps you are right, Jim," said she. "And if I did you would be able to marry Muffin, and that would be *ever* so much nicer for you."

Jim gave an exclamation of impatience.

"Who wants to marry Muffin, you great Goose?"

"But, Jim," said Miss Perry gravely, "she is such a——"

"Never mind what she is. I have my own opinion about her. I want to marry you, and I mean to."

In spite of the proximity of the Wargrave coat of arms, Jim Lascelles thereupon behaved in a very imperious and heedless manner. He encircled the ample form of Miss Perry and kissed her with great boldness. As no resistance was forthcoming, the operation was repeated.

"You great Goose!" he said.

Whether in the further absence of resistance Jim Lascelles would have continued in this behavior is hardly a profitable speculation. For at this moment there came an interruption. A small, round dog came waddling through the gate of Pen-y-Gros Castle. His tail was curled up in a most cynical manner and with eyes swollen with bakèd meats he gazed about him with the insolence of a feudal lord.

"Aunt Caroline!" whispered Miss Perry. There was

guilt on her conscience no doubt. She drew herself in very close to the pillar.

"She wouldn't come out in the dusk," said Jim. "It's only Ponto taking the air to get an appetite for dinner."

Jim picked up a pebble and with exact and careful aim dropped it on the supercilious nose of that overfed animal.

"Now, Goose Girl," said Jim, "it is high time you went up to dress, or you'll get none of those trout."

This reminder caused Miss Perry to flee. It was past eight already. Aunt Caroline brooked no delay, and Fanchette hated to hurry.

Jim walked sadly home to his evening chop. Why was he so poor? Why had he not more strength of character? The part he was playing was surely an unworthy one. It was the behavior of a spoil sport to be in Wales at all.

However, the person most concerned was far from intending to have his sport spoiled by anybody. Cheriton, in any event, felt fully competent to bring his suit to a successful issue. He had made the tedious journey to Pen-y-Gros for no other purpose.

It is true the unexpected presence of George Betterton was a little disquieting. Some six weeks had passed since their Sunday morning conversation at Ward's. The estimate he had then made of the temperature of George's affections had had a marked influence on his subsequent conduct. In the purview of this cool and wary calculator George was a decoy put up by Caroline Crewkerne to lure him into the mesh.

All the same, such a theory was not devoid of peril. And if George had had the wit to mask his intentions George indubitably would win the prize. Frankly he did not believe that George had the skill for such Machiavelian tactics. He was one of those plain, clumsy fellows

whom a child might read. Superficial observers of the Kendal type were always apt to jump far too quickly to conclusions. Quite a number of these had given George the prize already. But Cheriton built upon a more exact knowledge. George was a solid Tory who, when it came to the point, would think twice before making a duchess of a parson's penniless daughter.

Nevertheless, when he took in the wonderful Miss Perry, who, in spite of all that Fanchette could do, had kept dinner waiting nearly ten minutes, he was a little inclined to consider that he had run an unwarrantable risk for the mere pleasure of indulging his natural vein of cynicism. George was rather boastful about the trout, which were certainly delicious. And at the same time he waxed enthusiastic over Miss Perry's conduct of the punt and her manner of casting a fly. Moreover, he declared she could hook and play a fish with anybody.

"That is most interesting, my dear George," said Cheriton from across the table. "But what you say merely confirms the opinion one has long held of the sex."

"I should like to see her with salmon," said George. "I should like to see her on Mallock Water."

"Muffin is *ever* so much better than I am," said Miss Perry.

"She must come too," said George.

"Yes, it may be all right," murmured his watchful adversary with a little sigh. "I think the old fool is to be trusted."

Yet was he? Throughout the whole of dinner that problem loomed before him. No doubt it was the attitude of his hostess combined with the guilt upon his conscience which provoked uneasiness. That old woman had assumed a front of concentrated scorn which even she had never surpassed. And to make things worse,



she was continually putting forth sardonic little hints which were palpably aimed at his self-security.

There could be no doubt that Caroline Crewkerne was a bad one to cross. And further, there could be no doubt that she bitterly resented what she called "Cheriton's tactics." Had he not committed the unpardonable offense of seeing through and making light of her devices? It required a very bold person indeed to do that.

After dinner Araminta and Elizabeth had a game of billiards while their elders played cards. Caroline Crewkerne had developed a talent for bridge, which considering her advanced age was surprising. Miss Burden also was learning to play well, although it is true that she suffered from a cardinal weakness. Her reluctance to declare "no trumps" almost amounted to a flaw in her nature, and in the opinion of Cheriton, who was her partner as a rule, it was a great handicap in life. When it was George's turn to be "dummy" he invariably fell asleep, and before the game could proceed he had to be roused forcibly.

Caroline Crewkerne was one of those seasoned warriors who are not very particular what time they go to bed. Therefore Cheriton counted upon being able that night to deal with a certain matter which at the first opportunity he was determined to bring to a head. In this he was well within his reckoning, for Caroline and he easily sat out the others. It was about a quarter to eleven when George drank his final whisky and mineral water and in a condition of impending somnolence went to his repose.

"Now, Caroline," said Cheriton in an extremely businesslike manner, "let us settle this thing one way or the other. We have been playing with it long enough."

"To what thing, Cheriton, do you refer?" inquired that accomplished dissembler.

"The future of our delightful Miss Goose. Now,

Caroline, be practical. Be practical, Caroline, and I foresee no difficulty."

Caroline assumed her hanging-judge look. As a statesmanlike preliminary she snuffed the air. Cheriton, however, was not to be disconcerted by little things like these.

"Now, Caroline," he said coolly, "no one appreciates more than I do the honorable character of your motives. Your first wish and your last is to do your duty by your charming niece."

"Don't use so many words, Cheriton," said Caroline tartly. "Remember you are not wasting the time of the country in the House of Lords. I don't need any reminder from you to do my duty by the girl."

"Of course not, Caroline," said the mellifluous Cheriton. "But don't get your sense of duty unduly inflated. I want you to be reasonable. I am prepared to marry the girl—she is a sweet, good creature, and on the mother's side she is well born—but she is in no sense a *parti*; and perhaps I shall be forgiven if I feel that Cheriton House has a right to look for one."

"Let it," said Caroline succinctly.

"Forgive my plainness," said Cheriton harmoniously, "but one feels it to be necessary. As I say, I like the girl, and I am prepared to make what in the circumstances is a good offer. You are at liberty to reject it, of course; but frankly I don't think you can expect a better."

"Don't be too sure about it, my friend," said Caroline with a hawklike glint from under the bushy eyebrows.

"Oh, but I am," said Cheriton confidently. "George is no go."

"Pray what do you mean?" said Caroline sternly.

"You can lead a horse to the water, but you can't make him drink."

Caroline sat like a sibyl, her hands clenched in her lap.

“Would it surprise you to learn that George Betterton has made her an offer of marriage?”

“Yes, it would indeed. Either he was in his cups when he made it or he has since repented of his indiscretion. George is going to marry Priscilla L’Estrange.”

“What is your authority for that statement?” Caroline made the demand cautiously, for she had a very cool gaze fixed upon her.

“The authority of one’s intuitive perception.”

“Intuitive fiddlestick!”

“I know George nearly as well as I know you,” said the audacious suitor. “Had George intended to gobble at the cherry he would have done so six weeks ago during your untimely attack of laryngitis. But George is an old hand; and although it takes a seasoned campaigner to lead Priscilla L’Estrange to the altar, it is better that he should do so, as far as 650 Piccadilly is concerned, than that he should marry the penniless daughter of a country parson.”

Until the small hours of the morning this pair of worldlings sat discussing the pros and cons of the matter, with a tendency to haggle like a couple of Jews at an auction. The lion’s share of the blame undoubtedly belonged to Caroline Crewkerne. Cheriton, who knew her only too well, had far the more delicacy and liberality of mind. Moreover, he was quite as shrewd. In spite of this old woman’s lofty airs and her contempt for all outside the magic circle—and she reserved to herself the exclusive right to perform the geometrical feat of drawing it—at heart she was ruthlessly bourgeoisie. Indeed, she was apt to plume herself upon that quality, which, however, she preferred to call by another name. Therefore was Cheriton the more determined to give her a Roland for an Oliver.

Caroline Crewkerne was more handsomely endowed

with the goods of this world than in the view of some a private citizen has a right to be. She was a rich old woman, and like so many rich old women she was grasping. Cheriton was also rich, but for all his cynical airs, he was not such a fool as to make a god of his money. However, he was never averse from a battle of wits. If it was freely spiced with a frank contempt for the polite conventional glosses which he delighted to mock, so much the better.

Cheriton's first desire, apart from the state of his emotions, was to read his old friend a lesson. He knew that she had tried her best to overreach him. Not, of course, on her own behalf, but for the amateur's sheer love of gaming. He had had the *nous* to defend himself successfully, and now he must see if he could not exact from her a penalty. He was quite willing to marry Miss Perry, and before so doing was prepared to make her a handsome settlement. But at the same time he was determined that something substantial should be forthcoming from the other side.

That was the rock which sundered them finally at two o'clock in the morning. When this condition was first laid down Caroline laughed to scorn "the insolent proposal." In the presence, however, of Cheriton's extreme imperturbability, which none knew better how to assume on occasion, she grew gradually cooler, until as the clock struck two she brought herself to say that, "without pledging herself to anything, she would go into the matter carefully, and, if necessary, would take the advice of those who had had more experience in such affairs."

They parted amicably, and, it is to be feared, with a renewed respect for one another. They had fought many shrewd battles of one kind or another—over cards, over politics, over a flagrant job, over a third person's

reputation, over a sale of shares, in fact over all things under the sun, religion excepted. It was their custom to expect no quarter and to give none. But at the same time they bore no malice.

As Cheriton took his candle up the ghostly stone-flagged staircase, with suits of armor grinning at him and mediæval weapons menacing him from the walls, and the young moon peering at him through the oriel windows, he knew that his old adversary would make a last final and consummate effort to entangle George Betterton. And if she succeeded, the United Kingdom would not contain a happier old woman than she.

Outside the first door in the corridor was a pair of shoes. They were decidedly large. Outside the next door was another pair, far less fashionable in design, yet in size very similar. Cheriton stood a moment to gaze reflectively from one pair to the other.

"I shall risk it," he mused. "George won't rise now. But it is rather a pity both of 'em are so dooced handy with a rod and tackle."

"Cheriton," said a grim voice behind him, "do you know of what you remind me?"

"Paris on Mount Ida?"

"No," said Caroline. "You remind me of a fox outside a poultry yard looking for a hole in the fence."

Cheriton shook his head protestingly.

"A curiously banal figure. Why are you always so bourgeoisie, Caroline? You have no need to be."

Caroline also shook her head.

"Cheriton," she said with great resolution, "I don't believe a word you have told me about Priscilla L'Estrange."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### JIM LASCELLES ADDS HEROISM TO HIS OTHER FINE QUALITIES

FOUR hours later saw the inception of an imperial August day. The previous night Muffin had entered Goose's chamber by stealth, with bare feet and clad only in a white nightgown. She was armed with a fat bolster. After a solemn exchange of civilities, of which Muffin invariably got the worst, because Goose's aim was wonderfully true and she was not susceptible to the most tremendous buffets, they ended as usual by sharing the same bed and going to sleep in one another's arms. They did not heed anything else until the light of the morning touched their eyelids. As a rule it touched Muffin's first. It then became the duty of that active spirit, as soon as she realized that she was awake, to hale the still sleeping Goose out of bed. Sometimes, when even this herculean labor had been accomplished, she had to beat that somnolent creature about the head with a pillow before she could be induced to put on her stockings. This morning was no exception to the regular mode of procedure.

The mists were still gathered about Lake Dwygy, and little was to be seen of Gwydr and his brethren, when, hand in hand, Goose and Muffin came trampling the dew of the early August day. Bareheaded, laughing, gay as the birds of the air, they were supremely happy. Each had brought up the other from earliest infancy; and although exquisitely modest in all that pertained to her-

self, in regard to the fruit of her labors each had rather an exaggerated idea. Goose was excessively proud of Muffin and Muffin was excessively proud of Goose.

Tobias was borne in a bag. If strictly forbidden to catch rabbits, he was never denied an airing.

"There goes a squirrel," said Muffin. "Look in that tree. Up he goes—but it is not very high. I wonder if we could catch him for Aunt Caroline? Hold my bread and butter and don't eat it."

Muffin had established herself on the first branch already, when a voice great alike in scorn and authority was heard through the early morning stillness.

"Come out of that tree, you Ragamuffin. Leave that squirrel alone and kindly take the trouble to read the notice beneath you. 'The public is allowed in these woods on sufferance only by permission of the Right Honorable the Countess of Crewkerne. Any person guilty of disorderly conduct, or who does willful damage to the trees, shrubs and flowers, or who attempts to take fish from the lake, or who wanders in search of game, will be prosecuted with the utmost rigor of the law.' Come down at once, you Ragamuffin."

The voice belonged to Jim Lascelles, of course. Jim was looking rather haggard, weary, and disheveled. The truth was he had had no sleep during the night. In the acute phase of his fortunes he could not rest. A sensitive conscience assured him that he was on forbidden ground, seeking fruit to which he had no lawful claim. He would have been far better in Normandy.

This morning he was in quite a desperate mood. Work had never been farther from his thoughts, and the fact that two persons had recently been reputed to have lost their lives in an attempted ascent of the Devil's Footstool somehow invested that precipitous chasm with powerful attraction.

“Look here, you law-breakers,” said he, “let us go and have a look at the Devil’s Footstool.”

The Misses Perry needed no second invitation. That dark and baleful ascent looming up from the lower end of the lake had fascinated them already; indeed, they had made one or two tentative attempts upon it. A walk of twenty minutes brought them to the foot of the precipice; and Tobias being left in his bag at the bottom, the three of them began to conduct some highly interesting and extremely thrilling investigations.

From ledge to ledge they went, quickly rising to a dizzy and precarious height. On one side of them was a torrent, on the other a chasm. But they ascended boldly, without a pause, although the foothold was uncertain and it meant death and destruction to look down. And when, in the course of several hours, they returned breathless and disheveled to whence they started, having made a complete circuit of the Devil’s Footstool, and the three of them sat down exulting in weariness by the side of Tobias, they really felt that they had achieved something. The most signal feats of Widdiford and Slocum Magna had been eclipsed.

According to Borrow, Wales is not only a picturesque but also a romantic country. Therefore it was not very surprising that by half-past nine on this memorable August morning Jim Lascelles had become a hero in the sight of the world. The Castle breakfast table was regaled by a thrilling narrative of adventures by gorge and chasm.

It was not quite clear whether Jim Lascelles had saved the life of Muffin or whether Muffin had saved the life of Jim Lascelles. But one fact emerged clear, distinct, radiant. Jim Lascelles was a hero of the first class. His conduct within the precincts of the Devil’s Footstool merited a diploma.



Cheriton seconded the praises of his *protégé*.

"Bred in the fellow," said he. "His father, you know, was Lascelles, V.C."

"He looks that kind of young man," said Miss Burden. "His eyes are so open and fearless."

As soon as Aunt Caroline was visible, which was not until noon, she was put in possession of the facts.

"Who, pray, is Jim Lascelles?" was her first question; and the tone of it was not wholly sympathetic.

"He used to live at the Red House at Widdiford," chimed both her nieces as one.

In spite of his heroism, which no amount of cross-examination could mitigate, the leading questions Elizabeth was called upon to answer had the effect of rendering Aunt Caroline decidedly hostile to Jim Lascelles. For the identity of the presumptuous young man was only too soon established. He was the person who had flung himself out of the house in Hill Street after being rebuked for conduct which could not be forgiven. As for the "Jim," it stuck in Aunt Caroline's throat.

It was almost the only reminder their august relation had had, beyond the scanty nature of their wardrobe and a plebeian devotion to bread and jam, that their upbringing had been that of Tom, Dick and Harry.

"Elizabeth," said Aunt Caroline, "it would be more seemly to my mind if you have occasion to mention Mr. Lascelles to speak of him as such."

Muffin opened solemn and round eyes of wonder upon Aunt Caroline.

"Oh but," said she, "if I called Jim Mr. Lascelles he would pull my hair."

"In that case," said Aunt Caroline, "you would do well to terminate the acquaintance."

"But he saved me from falling down the precipice,"

said Muffin, "and I am going to write to dearest papa about it."

"Caroline," said Cheriton, "a truce to Whig exclusiveness. Behave like a human being and ask the young fellow to dinner. Ask his mother also. She is a singularly agreeable woman."

Aunt Caroline sat the image of blue-blooded defiance. George Betterton, however, who had listened torpidly to the account of the episode, was prevailed upon by the general enthusiasm for Jim Lascelles and the favorable impression he had already formed of that hero's mother to throw the weight of his own influence into the scale.

"Right thing, Caroline, to ask the young fellow to dinner in the circumstances. Behaved very well, they tell me."

"He shall not cross my threshold until he apologizes for his behavior to me in Hill Street."

"Of course he will apologize," said Cheriton, "if you hold out the olive branch. He can't apologize unless you do."

"I am sure, dear Lady Crewkerne," ventured Miss Burden, "Mr. Lascelles is a gentleman and his mother is a——"

Miss Burden was unable to complete her remark. She was annihilated by a glance. The elder Miss Perry, also, was tactless in the extreme.

"Jim is just a sweet," she drawled ridiculously, "and dear Mrs. Lascelles is just a sweet too."

The glance which had slain Miss Burden was extended to Miss Perry. Its effect upon that Featherbrain was nil.

"Jim is just a sweet," she proclaimed, "and Muffin saved him from falling over the precipice."

"I was given to understand," said Aunt Caroline, "that it was the man Lascelles who saved Elizabeth."

“Yes, it was, Aunt Caroline,” said Muffin, “but Goose is rather a silly.”

Of course, there could be only one conclusion to the whole matter. The massed force of public opinion was too strong for the Whig remnant, even in its own stronghold. Ungraciously, it must be confessed, Miss Burden was commanded to write as follows: “The Countess of Crewkerne requests the pleasure of the company of Mrs. Lascelles and Mr. James Lascelles at dinner this evening at 8.30.”

“This is one of your white days, Caroline,” said her oldest friend. “A singularly gracious act in a life which, if I may say so, has not been inconveniently full of them. We must mark it with a little white stone.”

“Don’t be a coxcomb, Cheriton. Who has dared to remove the ribbon from Ponto’s neck?”

“He lost it in the water,” said Muffin with all the assurance of one in favor at Court, “when he fell in.”

“When he fell in!” said Aunt Caroline.

“He went to sleep on the edge of the punt,” Muffin explained, “and he toppled over.”

“I trust,” said the least of Ponto’s admirers, “that the obese beast will not gain length of days from his immersion.”

John, wearing his second-best livery, which he always affected in Wales, delivered the mandate at Jim’s lodging in Pen-y-Gros hamlet, but that hero and his mother had gone down to the lake. Presently they were joined there by a cheerful party of four persons. Mr. Lascelles was roundly congratulated upon the heroism he had displayed.

“It has given great pleasure at the Castle,” said Cheriton, “where heroism is always, and I think justly, admired. My friend Brancaster will exert himself to get you a medal. Doubtless your Sovereign will present it to you.”

His Grace, in the manner of a true-blue Briton, went the length of shaking the hero warmly by the hand.

“Great pleasure to me, Mr. Lascelles, to hear of your gallant action. Congratulate you heartily. Would have given great pleasure to your gallant father.”

Jim Lascelles laid down his palette with an air of truculence.

“To whom am I indebted for this?” said he. “Which of them is it? I suspect that Goose.”

“They are both of them Geese,” said Jim’s mother.

“Aunt Caroline thinks it is so splendid of you,” said Muffin, who was seated on the pebbles for the purpose of removing her shoes and stockings. “She has invited you and dear Mrs. Lascelles to dinner.”

“You incomparably foolish person,” said Jim. “I’ve a great mind now not to paint you.”

“A pair of irresponsible babblers,” said Jim’s mother, whose eyes were really very bright indeed. “One is as bad as the other. But an old woman feels very proud of her son, all the same.”

Jim stuck his hands in his pockets ruefully.

“This is the dooce,” said he. “Upon my word, I deny the whole thing in the most absolute and unconditional manner.”

“I have heard you deny your genius before now,” said Mrs. Lascelles, “but, my dear boy, you have never been able to convince Lord Cheriton that you are not a genius. And I feel sure that all you say to the contrary will fail to convince him that you are not a hero.”

“Absurd!” said Jim hotly.

“You are in an awkward fix, my dear fellow,” said Cheriton. “Everybody who has heard Miss Muffin’s thrilling account of her deliverance from an imminent and deadly peril within the precincts of the Devil’s Coal Box——”

“Footstool,” said the elder Miss Perry.

“Footstool; I stand corrected,” said Cheriton, adding new embellishments to his oratory. “Everybody who has heard Miss Muffin’s hair-raising narrative of her deliverance from an imminent and deadly peril within the precincts of the Devil’s Footstool has conceived a deep admiration for its only begetter. From my old and misguided friend Lady Crewkerne to Ponto himself all at the Castle are of one mind. I may say the admiration of our friend Miss Burden is even tinged with romanticism.”

“Put on those shoes and stockings, you Ragamuffin,” said Jim. “I shall not paint you.”

“But, Jim,” said that artless person, with eyes of extraordinary roundness and candor, “you promised to.”

“Lascelles,” said Cheriton, “I am afraid you must accept the inevitable with all the grace at your command. No reasonable person can doubt your heroism, and I fear it is only critics of the older school who can doubt your genius. It is hard to conceive a situation more trying to a modest young Englishman, educated at Harrow. My dear Mrs. Lascelles, I feel constrained to compliment you publicly upon having a son who is the dooce of a fine fellow.”

“I am glad you think so, Lord Cheriton,” said Jim’s mother. “I think so myself.”

Thereupon the green linen frock and the red umbrella and the French novel, together with a choice suit of tweeds and a superb Panama hat, went along by the lake to take a closer view of that formidable chasm, the Devil’s Footstool. At the same time George Betterton handed Miss Goose aboard the punt.

Jim Lascelles took up the tools of his trade.

“Get into the water, you Ragamuffin,” said he. “I’ll

paint you with pink eyes and green hair. And your frock shall not have a single tear in it. It shall be the last cry of the fashion."

Things went excellently well for a time. It was a glorious August day. There was hardly a cloud about Gwydr; the sky was of a pure Italian hue; not so much as a puff of wind ruffled Lake Dwygy. For a bright and diligent hour Jim Lascelles was on the best of terms with his canvas.

"Keep this side, you Ragamuffin," said he, "and give the light of the morning a chance. Keep that cucumber basket out of the eye of the sun. And don't leave the water on any pretext. I am not in the least interested in toads, newts, lizards, speckled trout, ferns, grass or in your general conversation. Soak and tear and soil your garments to your heart's content, but you take those Foot Pieces out of the water on pain of appearing at Burlington House as an American heiress."

"But, Jim——"

"Silence, you Ragamuffin!"

"But, Jim, there is dearest Aunt Caroline."

It was perfectly true. The mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle was standing five yards from the canvas. She was in the full panoply of war. Ponto, her aide-de-camp, and Miss Burden, her gentlewoman, were by her side. An ebony stick supported her venerable frame; her headdress was surmounted by a hat that had been fashionable in 1880; blue glasses covered her grim old eyes; and the gentlewoman held an umbrella over the aged form to protect it from the fierce rays which according to Borrow are sometimes reflected from the slopes of the Welsh mountains.

"I am sorry to curtail a discourse on art," said the mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle, speaking in a tone that was beautifully clear, "but you do not seem to be aware

that the public is allowed in these grounds on sufferance only."

Jim took off his hat and bowed in a highly becoming if slightly ironical manner.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Crewkerne," said he, "but I am well aware of that. I have seen the notice warning the public at least six times this morning."

"I hope you will heed it," said Lady Crewkerne.

"It does not forbid the public to paint the scenery, I believe," said Jim coolly.

Jim had really no right to be so cool in the presence of the mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle. All the same, it is by no means certain that she did not respect him for it.

"It depends," said she, "upon what portion of the scenery the public wishes to paint. For instance, you seem to be painting some person who stands in the water. And the public is expressly forbidden to enter the water."

"I am very sorry," said the artist.

Jim Lascelles, for all his coolness, did not know what to say next to keep within the rules of the game. However, that section of the public which was standing in the water saw fit rather providentially to disobey the instructions of the artist. She left the water and came resolutely to the aid of Jim Lascelles. Barefooted and with her skirt kilted in the true Slocum Magna and Widdiford fashion, she accosted the mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle.

"Dearest Aunt Caroline," said she, "this is Mr. Jim Lascelles who saved me from falling over the precipice this morning."

"We have met before, I think," said Aunt Caroline grimly.

"Wasn't it brave of him?" said Muffin.

"Mr. Lascelles," said Aunt Caroline, "you appear to

have acted in a prompt and courageous manner, and I congratulate you upon your manly conduct."

"Thank you, Lady Crewkerne," said Jim with excellent gravity, "but I am happy to say Miss Perry has greatly exaggerated the occurrence."

"Oh, no, Jim," said Miss Perry. "Ask Goose."

"There is one thing, Mr. Lascelles," said the mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle, "that I hope you will take to heart. In future the public will be strictly forbidden to climb the Devil's Footstool."

"I think that precaution will be in its interests," said Jim. "It is all right going up, but it is a wicked place coming down."

"Well, Mr. Lascelles," said Lady Crewkerne, "it is satisfactory to learn that this injudicious adventure has terminated without loss of life. I shall be glad if you will dine at the Castle this evening."

Jim Lascelles was sufficiently mollified by the tone to accept the invitation.

"And for my part," said Jim, after he had done so, "I hope, Lady Crewkerne, you will accept an apology for my behavior the last time we met. I am afraid I was much in the wrong."

"Mr. Lascelles," said Lady Crewkerne, speaking very distinctly, "I have since thought that matter over carefully, and I have come to the conclusion that there is no need for me to revise the judgment I formed at the time. You were very much in the wrong. All the same, I have pleasure in accepting your apology. Miss Burden, we will return. I feel the heat."

Things having been placed on this amicable basis, the mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle withdrew with her retinue, and Muffin returned to the waters of Lake Dwygy.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### REVEL IS HELD AT PEN-Y-GROS CASTLE

**M**ODEST revel was held that evening at the Castle. Jim's mother erred so much on the side of youth that Jim was inclined to blame her for wearing her best gown. She knew perfectly well that she always did look young in her best gown, almost to the point of impropriety. It had been obtained in Paris for one thing, not very recently it is true, for Jim was then a gay and careless student at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts; but even at that time of day the dress-makers of Paris were known to possess a lightness of touch, a grace and felicity which made for youth. In her heart there is reason to believe Mrs. Lascelles considered her son to be unduly sensitive on the score of her appearance.

Caroline Crewkerne was moderately civil to the painting man's mother. But of course she wore a certain number of airs, as she invariably did when she had to do with persons of her own sex whom she did not consider her equals socially. But there is no need to blame her. The chameleon can change its spots, but it is not really more respected than the leopard. Caroline Crewkerne was three-and-seventy and habit was strong in her. She belonged to a period when airs were more in vogue, when human destinies were more unequal, when the grades of the social order were more sharply defined.

If Jim's mother was a little amused by the "grand manner"—and doubtless she was, because she had seen

something of the world—she did not betray her feelings. But Jim, at least, could not help secretly resenting it. He blamed himself for being fool enough to come. It is to be feared that he hated this old woman and all her works.

A friend of both, of an almost miraculous elegance, stood a little apart to witness Caroline Crewkerne offer two fingers and his *protégé's* acceptance thereof. Jim got through the ordeal without any loss of credit, but he was fuming within. However, there were compensations. George Betterton greeted the young fellow in quite a hearty manner; Miss Burden beamed upon him, and her appearance was singularly agreeable with "a romantic tale on her eyelashes"; while the Miss Perrys, of course, were triumphs of female loveliness. The elder of the twain, in her "play-acting frock" as Aunt Caroline called it, and with her daffodil-colored mane done low in her neck in a cunning simulation of the eighteenth century, by the hand of the incomparable but exacting Fanchette, was enough to haunt any young painter for many days to come. Muffin, too, with her brilliant health and her open manners, with a coloring only less wonderful than that of her sister, and with a physique pure of line and of a spreading, stalwart symmetry, looked every inch of her a veritable kinswoman of the goddess. Fanchette had been cajoled, perhaps by an inborn love of her art, to embellish Muffin's yellow mane also with the magic touch of her great talent, so that it also sat low in her neck in a fashion fit to inspire a sonnet.

Muffin's frock was of pure white—at least, that was its hue when first purchased. And although it was countrified and cheap and by no means new, and it was rent in three places, and was very short in the sleeves and very tight all over, it really suited her to perfection, as somehow everything did that she wore.

Lord Cheriton was delighted.

“Mrs. Lascelles,” said he, at the first opportunity, “what do you think of our Miss Gunnings?”

Jim’s mother sighed a little.

“Perfectly distracting,” said she. “And yet it only seems yesterday that they were long-legged creatures in short white socks.”

George Betterton took in his hostess, Cheriton took in the wife of the Vicar, the Vicar took in Mrs. Lascelles, Jim took in Miss Burden, and the Miss Perrys took in one another.

Jim Lascelles never remembered a meal that he enjoyed less, except in years to come—but that is another story. For a good deal of the conversation hung round one theme, and the theme was heroism. Cheriton claimed the respectful indulgence of the table while Muffin furnished her thrilling narrative with all the latest embellishments. She suffered occasional contradiction in the course of it from her muddle-headed but tenacious sister Goose, but her testimony remained substantially unshaken. Mr. James Lascelles was a hero, no doubt about that.

When the dessert stage was reached Cheriton went to the length of pledging Jim’s health in felicitous terms and in some excellent Madeira. Jim responded with a vehement denial of the charges brought against him.

“Why,” said Cheriton, “he will deny his genius next.”

“He would,” said the artist’s mother, “but he knows it’s no use.”

After dinner there was music. Caroline Crewkerne had an ingrained dislike of music which amounted to detestation, but on this occasion it was permitted as a concession to the Church. The Vicar’s wife had a light soprano voice and sang very pleasantly, although rather nervous at first. The Vicar’s rendering of the “Bay of

Biscay" was justly admired. Mrs. Lascelles interpreted Chopin with such delicacy and refinement that Caroline Crewkerne was able to get a short nap. But quite one of the most popular achievements of the evening was George Betterton's rendering of what he called his "one horse," a technical term which baffled everybody as to its meaning, including Cheriton himself, that veritable encyclopædia of information.

George Betterton's "one horse" was "We'll all go a-hunting to-day," with chorus. This he rendered with the most resolute disregard of time and tune and in the most dogged and sonorous manner. The Vicar's wife played the accompaniment and finished three bars in front of George, and so "won as she pleased" in the judgment of Cheriton, who in addition to his other accomplishments was a critic of the art of music. However, Muffin and Jim Lascelles were heard to such advantage in the chorus that there was no doubt about its success. Upon this revelation of their talent they were importuned to sing a solo apiece. They contrived to evade this penalty on the plea that they had never sung in public before, although Goose declared that Muffin had sung by herself twice in Slocum Magna Parish Church with great distinction.

"But that wasn't in public," said Muffin staunchly. "Besides, it was after dearest papa had preached his sermon."

"I am afraid, my dear Miss Muffin," said Cheriton, "that the point is a little too subtle for the lay intelligence."

Although Muffin and Jim Lascelles were absolved from singing *solus*, they did not get off scot-free. They were haled to the piano to render a duet from "H. M. S. *Pinafore*," and made such a hopeless mess of the business that Jim's mother, who accompanied them, took the ex-

treme course of closing the piano and retiring in the middle of the performance.

A display of thought-reading ended the proceedings. The Vicar's wife was a clairvoyante, noted for miles around. Cheriton also confessed to powers in this occult science. The Vicar's wife was only allowed to perform one feat, because the Vicar declared that they kept her awake at night. The task allotted to her was to take the ribbon from Ponto's neck and tie it round Goose's finger. It was performed with such exemplary ease that Muffin felt sure that she could do something. Hers was the elementary task of giving Miss Burden a kiss. Instead of fulfilling it, she hugged Aunt Caroline. In the opinion, however, of those best acquainted with these mysteries she was held to be so nearly right that her reputation was at once established.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" said Goose with dilated eyes. "I shall write to dearest papa about it. At the next entertainment in Slocum Magna parish room Muffin will have to do something."

"I think," said Mrs. Lascelles, "her powers as a clairvoyante are superior to her powers as a cantatrice."

Muffin was showing a desire to give a further display of this newly discovered talent when Aunt Caroline said it was half-past ten and that Araminta and Elizabeth must retire.

After saluting Aunt Caroline in a very dutiful manner they obeyed the edict with really charming docility. It proved a signal for the dispersal of the company. No doubt Aunt Caroline intended that it should.

As soon as the Vicar and his wife and Jim Lascelles and his mother were abroad in the rapt summer stillness, and they had begun to pick their way through the crypt-like darkness of the wood towards Pen-y-Gros hamlet, the inmates of the Castle sat down to the green table.

Caroline Crewkerne yawned vigorously. But her opponents did not misinterpret her action, because they knew this old woman never sat down to cards without proving herself to be more than usually wide-awake.

“Caroline,” said her oldest friend, “this is one of the whitest days in my recollection of you. Without going so far as to say that you were genial, you certainly got through the evening without treading upon the toes of anybody.”

“The middle classes are so tiresome,” said Caroline, cutting for the deal and winning it easily.

“The middle classes no longer exist as a genus,” said Cheriton. “They have assimilated culture so rapidly since that fellow Arnold wrote to them upon the subject that nowadays they are almost as extinct as the dodo.”

“Pshaw!” said Caroline, carefully sorting a hand that contained four aces and three kings. “It is only skin deep. Don’t be a coxcomb, Cheriton. I declare no trumps.”

“I shall not double,” said Cheriton, who found himself in possession of a Yarborough.

In double-quick time he and Miss Burden had suffered the indignity of the “grand slam.”

“Well played, partner,” said George as soon as he woke up.

Few people could play their cards better than Caroline Crewkerne when she found herself holding a really good hand. And few people found themselves oftener in that happy position. This evening she surpassed herself. It is true that fortune favored her quite shamelessly. But she utilized it to the full; and further, she took advantage of the mistakes of her principal adversary.

It was seldom that Cheriton was guilty of serious mistakes; but on this occasion he certainly held poor cards, and to these were added inferior play. He was continu-

ally forgetting; and twice at a critical moment he revoked. Caroline was in high glee. Everything went right for her; and the sum she won from Cheriton if hardly enough "to endow a hospital for the incurably insane" as he declared it to be, certainly put the lucky Caroline in high feather.

Soon after midnight George Betterton retired in earnest to his repose, while Miss Burden followed his example. And no sooner had the hostess and her old friend the field to themselves than they reverted to the topic of the previous night. The matter had been left in an interesting stage. Cheriton somehow felt it to be a hopeful one. He was sure that he had no serious rival to contend against, for George with all his flourishes was bound to end by marrying Priscilla. The Georges of the world invariably marry the Priscillas.

"I am willing to tie three thousand a year upon the creature." Cheriton's tone was not exactly that of an auctioneer, although his native wisdom made it necessary that when in Rome he should do as the Romans. "Upon the condition, Caroline, that you tie an equal sum upon her. And there is also a living in my gift worth eleven hundred a year which is likely to be vacant."

So much for the terms. Caroline Crewkerne pondered them well. She was a hard-headed, covetous, hard-hearted old woman. But if she took a thing in hand she carried it through. And she had made up her mind to do something for her dead and disgraced sister's portionless girl. Up to a point she was able to plume herself on the success of the negotiations. What she did not like was to sacrifice some of her own money. It would not make the least difference to her. She had more than she knew what to do with, but she always found parting with her substance irksome.

"We will say fifteen hundred a year, Cheriton, and

consider the matter settled," said Caroline with the air of a money-lender.

Her old crony frankly enjoyed the situation. He knew where the shoe pinched as well as she did. Her craft and her avarice reminded him of Balzac's novels.

"If you say fifteen hundred, my dear Caroline, I must say fifteen hundred too."

Caroline pondered again. Cheriton was not a good life and the major part of his property was entailed.

"Three thousand a year in perpetuity?" said Caroline harshly.

"Ye-es," said Cheriton. "Dooeed liberal, I think, for a poor parson's daughter."

Caroline bristled. She looked not merely prickly but positively venomous.

"Don't forget, Cheriton," she said truculently, "that the creature is a Wargave."

"An effete strain, there is reason to fear," said Cheriton with admirable composure.

The headdress performed surprising feats. My lord fell to considerations of how far it might be safe to bait the old lioness. No sport is worth much unless there is a spice of danger in it. He enjoyed the game none the less because he knew its peril. Caroline Crewkerne was not a person to be baited with impunity.

However, in spite of the headdress and the red gleams that flashed from the ruthless orbs beneath it, Cheriton was able to simulate perfect indifference. The finished duplicity may or may not have deceived his old friend. But the lines round her mouth grew terribly hard and sarcastic.

"Well, Caroline," said Cheriton amiably, "let us settle the thing one way or the other. It is becoming tedious."

Perhaps Caroline thought so too. Or she may have thought, all things considered, she had made a reasonably



good bargain, and that she was not likely to improve upon it. For there came a further accession of scorn to that grim frontispiece, and for a moment the head-dress ceased to gyrate.

“Take the girl and be damned!” said Caroline Crewkerne.

Cheriton bowed with ironical politeness. He had got his way, although there was nothing surprising in that. He had had it so often. But he was a little inclined to plume himself on his diplomacy. It was an achievement to screw a cool three thousand a year out of the most avaricious old woman in England. Not that he cared greatly about money; but that was no reason why he should not toy with those who did care greatly about it when he was in need of a little private relaxation.

Cheriton went to bed and slept soundly. He felt that he had obtained a charming countess on liberal terms. How the young fellows would envy him! In his mind’s eye he could see himself walking down the aisle, his young goddess on his arm, with all the gravity of a pillar of the Government, and looking if anything rather more than his years in order to score off the rising generation.

“He is so old, my dear!” he could hear the buzz of tongues. Yes, so old. What had happened to Youth and its vaunted pretensions?

Caroline Crewkerne went to bed also and slept soundly. She was well satisfied that she had won at cards, although in the matter of her niece she had a very decided feeling that the man Cheriton had overreached her. The three thousand pounds per annum took a good deal of the gilt off the gingerbread. Without that proviso there would have been a certain amount of gilt upon it.

Cheriton, for all his coxcombry, was a pretty considerable *parti*, at whom the arrows of the worldly had been aimed for two generations. But in Caroline’s own

phrase, "Cheriton was no fool." In spite of his fribbling and his vanity, he knew his way about the world. He was a cool and sure hand and by no means easy to catch napping. Great would be the applause and the merriment when it became bruited abroad that this astute bird had actually been limed by the old fowler of Hill Street. And after all, nobody need know about that three thousand a year.

Therefore both parties to the transaction slept the sleep of the just and next morning had breakfast in their rooms. At half-past five A. M. the unconscious object of their negotiations was haled out of bed by her sister Muffin. And as the descent to the floor did not arouse her, she was beaten about the head with a pillow until this object had been attained. They spent incomparable hours on the slopes of Gwydr. Jim Lascelles was with them. He piloted them among the rocks, and was of course prepared to save their lives if necessary.

These were golden and enchanted hours. For all her slowness of speech and action, the Goose Girl had a certain animation and inward fire when in her true Slocum Magna form. Little of it had been seen in Hill Street, for amid that rather dismal splendor she was a bird in a cage. But now with the freedom of the mountains conferred upon her, with Jim upon one hand and Muffin upon the other, existence was a carol. The old glories of the Red House at Widdiford were revived.

These joys continued during a number of brave and brilliant days. Cheriton, secure in his prize, was in no hurry to impale his butterfly. She was altogether charming, and he would claim her at his leisure. In the meantime let her garner up a store of health and vigor upon the mountains in the society of her peers. For, truth to tell, the bridegroom elect was apt to get fatigued rather easily, and it was really more satisfying to share a red

umbrella with an intellectual equal and to discuss the French writers beside the lake.

Therefore, with the humane wisdom which distinguished him beyond other men, Cheriton was content that they should continue each in a private paradise as long as it could possibly endure. Things were going very well. Why disturb them? The prize was secure. Caroline had given her sanction and had written to her lawyer upon the subject. There was really no more to be said. Why imperil present harmony? *À la bonne heure!* When there were no mountains, no lakes, no cloudless August skies, no red umbrellas, no green linen frocks, no singularly companionable, cultivated and agreeable students of the best French literature, would be the time to speak of love.

Yes, Cheriton was a cool hand. Indeed, Caroline Crewkerne was a little inclined to doubt his *bona fides*.

"I have not seen the creature in tears yet," said she three days after that memorable night in which the compact was made.

"Do not let us commit the indiscretion," said the victorious suitor, "of acting prematurely. I have always been a believer in *laissez faire*. If things are going obviously well, why disturb them? The creature rejoices in her youth, her companions and her mountains. I am too old for mountains myself. But do not let us rob her happiness of a single hour. And, upon my word, she seems to grow more glorious every time I look at her."

"Humph!" said Caroline Crewkerne.

"Let us do nothing," said the happy wooer, "to impede this overflow of health and gayety. Upon my word, the bracing climate of the Welsh mountains has given her a fire it does one good to see."

"Cheriton," was the stern rejoinder, "if I had not the

best of reasons to know otherwise I should think you were a fool."

"I am very happy to be one just now," said he, "in the cause of youth."

"You were always a coxcomb," said this unsparing critic, "and if one of these days you don't have to pay a price for it I shall be deceived. In my opinion it is high time the creature began to shed a few tears."

"No, no, Caroline. Let us have the humanity to give her the joy of her mountains as long as we can."

Caroline shook her worldly-wise head. She grew very thoughtful indeed. There was the question of the red umbrella. But she did not alarm herself. Cheriton had played that game so often.

The days passed merrily. It was a perfect time, with hardly more than a wisp of cloud about the noble head of Gwydr. And as the placid waters of Lake Dwygy remained seductively delicious, it is not to be wondered at that the picture of the naiad made considerable progress.

There was no doubt about the wonderful growth of power that had come to Jim Lascelles. Having given his days to the limning of the Goose Girl and his nights to thoughts of her, this expenditure of spirit was now manifesting itself in his brush. The naiad bade fair to be a brilliantly poetic composition, whose color had the harmonious daring that had given Monsieur Gillet a European fame. The frank treatment of the naiad's blue eyes and yellow hair, which had made the portrait of her sister so wonderful, were now adjusted to the majestic scheme of Dwygy's blue waters and Gwydr's brown slopes crowned with golden haze, with here and there a black patch of the woods about Pen-y-Gros. Cheriton ministered to the pride of the painter's mother by outspoken but judicious praise of what he held to be a signal work of art.

The August sunshine, however, cannot last forever. And at last, as Muffin's second triumphant fortnight was nearing its close, the clouds gathered about Gwydr and his brethren, and the woods of Pen-y-Gros were drenched with a sopping mist. This presently turned to a down-pour of rain which lasted a day and a night. In that period something happened.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A THUNDERBOLT

**W**HILE the rain was beating with monotonous persistency upon the oriel windows of Pen-y-Gros Castle Araminta was summoned to Aunt Caroline's boudoir. So little did the artless creature suspect what was going to happen that she obeyed the summons joyfully. She had an idea that she was about to be consulted as to whether Muffin would like to stay on still longer. But it proved to be something else.

Aunt Caroline was looking very bleak and formidable, and Lord Cheriton, who was also present, had never seemed so much like a father, so benevolently unbending was his manner.

"Girl," said Aunt Caroline—she very seldom addressed Araminta in any other style than "Girl"—"sit down and try not to behave foolishly. I am going to speak about your future."

Araminta hardly knew that she had such a thing as a future. Howbeit, with her usual docility she sat upon the chair that Aunt Caroline indicated, and proceeded to give her best attention to that stern and difficult old woman.

"I will be brief," said Aunt Caroline with an extremely businesslike air. "My old friend Lord Cheriton has been good enough to take an interest in you, and if you are a good girl he will marry you. You have no objection, I presume?"

It was clear from Aunt Caroline's tone that she merely put the question as a matter of form. But that brisk old worldling went a little too quickly for her niece Araminta, who was really a very slow-witted creature. Some little time had to pass before she could grasp the full meaning of Aunt Caroline's announcement. And when at last she was able to do so it took away her breath.

Aunt Caroline allowed the creature quite thirty seconds in which to reply. No reply being forthcoming in that space of time, she proceeded to address her as though she were a prisoner at the bar.

"Well, girl, what have you to say?"

Araminta had nothing to say apparently. But from the roots of her hair downwards a slowly deepening wave of scarlet was spreading over the whole surface of her frank and vividly colored countenance.

"Humph!" said Aunt Caroline, "no objection apparently." She then addressed a third person tersely and very much to the point. "Cheriton," said she, "I congratulate you. You are not everybody's choice, and I must confess to some surprise that no objection has been urged. That is the Wargrave in her, I dare say. The Wargraves have always known how to accept the inevitable. They have often gone to the scaffold rather than make a pother."

"Family pride again, my dear Caroline," said Cheriton in a voice of honey. "Still, in the circumstances perhaps a slight display of it is pardonable. History is not my strong point, but I seem to remember that between the age of Edward VI, and the age of Victoria the Wargraves went oftener to the scaffold than anywhere else. There is always something rather baffling about the pride of old families. If we go back far enough we generally find that a lawyer who was too astute to be honest es-

established their fortunes, or a fellow who managed to cheat the troops in Flanders of their food and clothing."

"Don't be a coxcomb, Cheriton," was the sharp rejoinder. "Remember my niece. I shall expect you to be good to her. Fortunately for herself she has no brains, but she eats well and sleeps well, she is quite healthy in every respect and her disposition is affectionate."

"Our dear Miss Goose is perfectly charming," said Cheriton, ogling Miss Perry, who by this time was trembling violently, and who sat in solemn scarlet consternation. "I am the proudest man in England."

Caroline Crewkerne raised a finger.

"You have said enough, Cheriton. I have my own opinion about the transaction, but I am inclined to think the creature might have done worse. You can go now, girl. Don't mention this matter to your sister until you have my permission to do so."

Miss Perry rose with her usual docility, but in her face was an ever-deepening scarlet. She moved slowly and heavily to the door of the boudoir without speaking a word. Her hand was already upon the door handle when she slowly turned about with a face of absolute dismay.

"If you please, Aunt Caroline," she drawled in her most ridiculous manner, "I don't quite think I *can* marry Lord Cheriton."

The old woman sat up in her chair like a Lord Chief Justice confronted with a flagrant contempt of court.

"What do you mean, girl? You don't quite think you can marry Lord Cheriton. Explain your meaning."

In the most favorable circumstances it was never easy for Miss Perry to explain her meaning. Just now she seemed to find considerable difficulty in doing so. Aunt Caroline gave her exactly thirty seconds, but Miss Perry required far longer than that.



"Speak, girl. Are you dumb?"

Miss Perry was not dumb, but words had never been so difficult to find.

"Girl, will you have the goodness to explain why you are not *quite* able to marry Lord Cheriton?"

At last Miss Perry was able to furnish the required explanation.

"If you please, Aunt Caroline," she drawled ridiculously, "I have p-r-r-romised to marry Jim."

The old woman's ebony walking stick fell to the ground so peremptorily that Ponto was disturbed in his slumbers.

"Jim!" said Aunt Caroline. "Who, pray, is Jim?"

"Jim Lascelles," said Miss Perry.

"I presume you mean the painting man."

"Yes," said Miss Perry.

There was a pause, while Cheriton and his old friend looked at one another.

"Hand me my stick."

Miss Perry did as she was desired. Her way of obeying the order clearly implied that she expected to receive her deserts.

"Sit down, girl."

Miss Perry sat down in a manner which expressed a decided relief at such a narrow escape.

"I could not have believed," said Aunt Caroline speaking very slowly, "that a Wargrave should be so imprudent, so ungrateful, so entirely lacking in self-respect."

The indictment was crushing, but a good deal of the effect was marred because Cheriton laughed outright in the middle. Aunt Caroline, however, presented a haughty indifference to the behavior of the husband-elect, who, of course, was not himself a Wargrave, and whose behavior in this crisis proved the fact clearly.

"Are you mad, girl? Answer me."

"Jim is awfully nice," drawled Miss Perry.

The ebony walking stick and the headdress performed a concerted piece which seemed to fill even Ponto with consternation.

"The creature must be a natural."

Miss Perry grew bolder, however, as the clear conviction that she was pledged to Jim Lascelles took a firmer hold upon her.

"We shall not marry just yet, don't you know," she said with the air of one imparting valuable information. "But Jim is going to get rich so that he can buy back the Red House at Widdiford, and then we are going to live in it, and it will be too sweet."

Words having suddenly failed Aunt Caroline, it devolved upon Cheriton to say something.

"Capital!" said he.

This expression of opinion seemed to help Caroline Crewkerne through her crisis.

"You inconceivably foolish girl," she said with great energy. "Have you no sense of decency?"

"Muffin has p-r-r-romised to wear her mauve at the wedding," drawled Miss Perry.

Had not the husband-elect blown his nose very vigorously there is reason to fear that he would have been guilty of another serious lapse.

"Silence, girl!" said Aunt Caroline. "Don't speak another word until you have permission. This comes of crossing the breed. Now listen to me. The sooner you remove the man Lascelles from that inconceivably foolish and demoralized head the better it will be for you. Where is your self-respect? Where is your sense of decency?"

"Muffin——" began Miss Perry, but an imperious finger stayed her.

"Don't speak," said Aunt Caroline. "Simply listen.

Dismiss the man Lascelles from your mind, and try to remember who you are and where you are and what you are saying. My old friend Lord Cheriton desires to marry you. Understand that clearly. And he has my permission to do so. Understand that clearly also. Now you may say something.”

Miss Perry turned to Lord Cheriton with a smile of really charming friendliness.

“It is so dear of you,” she said. “If I were not going to marry Jim I would marry you. Perhaps Muffin——”

Aunt Caroline affronted the nerves of Ponto by rapping sharply with her stick upon the floor.

“That is quite enough. Dismiss the man Lascelles from your mind once and for all. You are going to marry Lord Cheriton. Is that quite clear?”

Apparently this was not quite so clear to Miss Perry as it was to Aunt Caroline. For that Featherbrain opened her eyes to their limit, and a look of sheer perplexity settled upon her scarlet countenance.

“But if you don’t mind, dearest Aunt Caroline, I p-r-r-romised to marry Jim.”

Aunt Caroline began to storm.

“Girl, have you no brains at all! Now listen once more. Your father, your brothers and your sisters are all as poor as mice, are they not?”

“Yes, dearest Aunt Caroline,” said Miss Perry quite simply.

“Very good. Now heed this carefully. By the terms of your marriage settlement, which I may say has been arranged not without difficulty, you will become a countess with six thousand a year in your own right, with a house to live in, and your father or one of your brothers will have the reversion of a living worth eleven hundred a year which is in Lord Cheriton’s gift. Now have you

the intelligence to comprehend all that has been said to you?"

Apparently Miss Perry had. No doubt her mind was a slow-moving affair which often had difficulty in dealing with the most obvious facts; but it was not easy for the dullest to misunderstand Aunt Caroline. Very slowly this hard lucidity made its impact upon Miss Perry; and as surely as it did so, large tears welled into eyes that had deepened to the color of violets. In ridiculous procession they rolled down the crimson cheeks.

Neither Caroline Crewkerne nor her old friend were easily moved, but there was something in the solemn, slow-drawn emotion of Miss Perry that imposed silence upon them. The pause which ensued was decidedly uncomfortable, and by tacit consent it was left to Miss Perry herself to terminate it.

"It is so dear of you both to be so good to me. I shall write to dearest papa about you, but I p-r-r-romised Jim."

Aunt Caroline snorted.

"And what do you suppose your father will say to you, you simpleton, when he learns what you have done? Send the man Lascelles to me. I will deal with him. And you had better prepare to marry Lord Cheriton some time in October."

But Miss Perry sat the picture of woe. It is true that in the sight of my lord she was a perfectly enchanting picture; at the same time, it gave him no particular pleasure to notice that the absurd creature was shedding real ears—tears which in their sincerity were almost majestic.

Araminta was dismissed with strict instructions not to mention the subject to any one.

"What a creature!" said Caroline Crewkerne as soon as the door had closed upon her niece.

She contented herself with that. As for Cheriton, he gave an amused shrug and said nothing. For all his nonchalance he could not help feeling that he was tempting Providence. Yet so ingrained was his habit of cynicism that it did not occur to him that he had anything to fear from Jim Lascelles. The young man had not one shilling to rub against another, he was a sensible fellow, and he had been properly brought up. That in such circumstances he should take the unpardonable liberty of offering to marry Caroline Crewkerne's niece was simply inconceivable.

It was left to Caroline herself to break a long and rather irksome pause.

"Cheriton," said she, "we are both of us old enough to know better. In the first place you ought not to have brought that man to Hill Street, and in the second I ought not to have allowed him to enter the house. However, the mischief is done. We must now take steps to repair it."

"I shall be interested, my dear Caroline," was the cool rejoinder, "to learn what those steps are."

## CHAPTER XXIX

### JIM LASCELLES WRITES HIS NAME IN THE VISITORS' BOOK

**T**HE husband-elect felt some curiosity as to the course to be adopted in this crisis by so hard-headed a diplomatist.

"Do you assure me positively that the man is a gentleman?" said Caroline Crewkerne.

Cheriton ruminated. The term, as he understood it and as Caroline interpreted it, was of a somewhat baffling complexity.

"Ye-es," said he, after an interval of unusually weighty reflection, "I should be inclined to say he was by way of being one."

"As that is your opinion," said Caroline grimly, "I shall speak a few words to him myself upon the subject."

Cheriton pondered the matter considerably.

"My dear Caroline," he said finally, "it is either the worst thing you can do or it is the best."

"I agree with you, Cheriton. And it all depends upon the man himself. Ask Miss Burden to look him up in *Walford*."

*Walford* preserved so much discretion upon the subject of Jim Lascelles that, although several of his name were mentioned, neither he nor his forbears were singled out for special notice. The practical Caroline having duly recorded the fact that "it was as she feared," desired to know whether *Walford* had anything to say upon the subject of his mother. However, as no one at Pen-y-Gros

Castle was acquainted with the maiden name of Jim's mother, Caroline's curiosity in regard to her also had to go unsatisfied. Nevertheless she had fully made up her mind to speak to this young man.

To that end John was dispatched after dinner that evening to the lodgings of Mr. James Lascelles in Pen-y-Gros hamlet with the compliments of his mistress and the request that Mr. Lascelles would be kind enough to call at the Castle at noon on the morrow.

Mr. Lascelles sent back word that he would be glad to do so. Yet no sooner had the cottage gate clicked behind the Castle emissary than he repented, and it was only in deference to the wisdom of his mother that John was not recalled.

Mrs. Lascelles shook her head sagely.

"When will you learn, my son, that old ladies who live in Hill Street, Berkeley Square, must be treated *au grand sérieux*, particularly by rising young painters."

Jim ruefully supposed that it was so. "And if one James Lascelles is ever to find the wherewithal to get back the Red House at Widdiford he must learn to keep his tongue in his cheek, and also learn how to stroke the fur of every old puss that ever stuck a coronet upon the panel of her carriage."

"For shame, my son!"

Jim's power of resentment was unchristian and did him no credit, but perhaps he would have shown less promise in his art had he been less susceptible to the rubs of the world.

However, as the morning was wet, he did not mind so much that he was due at Pen-y-Gros Castle at noon. He put on his carefully brushed blue suit and the black silk tie that his mother had knitted for him recently with her own fair hands, and as the clock struck twelve was seeking admittance at those gloomy portals. In the act of

doing so he looked in vain for signs of the Goose girl and her sister. He could not help asking himself what the old heathen wanted him for. Nothing agreeable, he would take his oath. Doubtless the Goose had blabbed. If so, a warm quarter of an hour was before him. Yet he felt that he was not going to mind very much. After all, the old beldame was quite likely to get as good as she gave.

He was received by John, who promptly handed him over to Marchbanks himself. "Will you please come this way, sir?" said that functionary with rather an excess of manner.

Jim followed Marchbanks, after bestowing a somewhat contemptuous glance upon a daub in the hall which purported to be the work of one Tintoret. A little farther along, however, was a Cavalier by Vandyck, which was more to his taste. He glanced at the furniture also, which was very good of its kind. Some chairs of embossed Spanish leather he particularly coveted. At the head of a wide, stone-flagged staircase, which he duly ascended was a *portière* of Gobelin tapestry. Passing through this, he was led along a corridor containing good pictures and bad, and mediæval weapons and suits of armor, until at last he found himself in an extremely cosy room the floor of which was strewn with Turkish mats. And there, seated alone and singularly upright in a high-backed chair with a hideous little dog sleeping by her footstool, was the old woman Jim Lascelles so cordially disliked.

The visitor was a little surprised that the old woman deigned to offer, not two fingers only, but the whole of her hand.

"What is in the wind, I wonder?" mused Jim, as he accepted the hand with his best bow.

"It is good of you to come, Mr. Lascelles," said the old



woman, by no means ungraciously. There never was an old woman yet who could not contrive to be agreeable if she really made up her mind to be so. And the mistress of Pen-y-Gros Castle was no exception to the universal rule. "Pray be seated," said she.

The old woman was very concise, very businesslike, very matter-of-fact.

"I would like to speak to you upon an important matter," she began. "It has come to my knowledge that you have been paying your addresses to my niece, Miss Perry."

Jim Lascelles was prepared for the speech in its substance, but its calm, noncommittal air was decidedly baffling. He had to confess, however, that the indictment was more or less correct.

The old woman received the admission not unamiably.

"I am sorry that you should have done so," she said. "Anything of that kind can hardly fail to be detrimental to my niece's future."

Jim, with excellent gravity, was indeed sorry to learn that.

"I will explain. My niece is a penniless girl, and I am given to understand, Mr. Lascelles, that you are a young professional man with your way to make in the world."

Jim, who had detachment enough to admire the old woman's statesmanlike plainness, assured her that such was the case.

"That being so," she proceeded, "a union between you is undesirable from my niece's point of view and also from your own."

"I hope I am not entirely without prospects," said Jim, who, however, did not mention his prospects with any great depth of conviction.

“They belong to the future,” said the old woman. “They will take time to materialize. I prefer to deal with the present.”

“Miss Perry and I had not contemplated marriage just at present.”

“Quite so,” said the aunt of Miss Perry. “Sensible of you both not to do so.”

The old woman’s tone was devoid of irony, but the absence of it merely seemed to heighten the amount there was in her aspect. Jim thought he had never seen a human countenance that he liked so little.

“What I wish to point out to you,” the old woman went on, “is that my niece has lately received an offer of marriage from an eligible quarter.”

From the first Jim had been expecting some such thunderbolt. Therefore he was able to maintain his pose of scrupulously polite attention.

“The offer of marriage my niece has received is of such a character that those who have her welfare at heart feel very strongly that she is bound to entertain it. Not only will it give her an assured position socially, but also it will establish the fortunes of her family, which, as you are doubtless aware, are at a low ebb.”

Jim’s gentle smile assured the old woman that he was not unacquainted with the fortunes of Miss Perry’s family.

“In these circumstances, Mr. Lascelles, I think your course is clear.”

Jim, however, looked perplexed.

“I wish, Lady Crewkerne,” said he, “that I shared your opinion.”

The old woman showed no acerbity.

“Have the goodness, Mr. Lascelles, to examine the matter in a rational light, from the point of view of a man of the world.”

“In other words, Lady Crewkerne, you wish me to give her up?”

“I do,” said the old woman.

Jim pondered a little. It was not very easy to give up the Goose Girl. But this uncompromising old heathen in her great headdress, installed in her state chair of embossed Spanish leather, had shown him his duty a dead sure thing. And she had used the fewest words possible in so doing.

“To my mind, Mr. Lascelles, your duty is perfectly clear,” said she after a full minute of silence had passed.

Very dubiously, and with a sharp intake of breath, Jim agreed. And then after a moment’s pause, in the vain hope of finding a way of circumventing his obvious duty, he rose from his chair.

“Lady Crewkerne,” he said, “to-morrow we leave the neighborhood, my mother and I. We thank you very much for the hospitality you have shown us.”

Thereupon Jim made his best bow. With the air of one who has performed a dignified action he prepared to take his leave.

“Thank you, Mr. Lascelles,” said the old woman, upon a note of veiled sarcasm, which yet was not so unpleasant as it might have been. “I am obliged to you. I shall be glad if you will write your name in the visitors’ book.”

In this fashion the audience terminated, with a display of dignity upon both sides. Considering all the circumstances, it was proper and natural that this should be the case. And in the hall Mr. Lascelles wrote his name in the visitors’ book immediately below that of his Grace the Duke of Brancaster, who had left Pen-y-Gros Castle the previous week.

## CHAPTER XXX

### GOOD-BY

**B**EFORE breakfast next morning Jim Lascelles said good-by to the Goose Girl on the slopes of Gwydr. For that slow-witted but tenaciously affectionate creature it was an overwhelming day. Muffin was leaving also by the eleven o'clock train.

The eyes of Miss Perry were heavy with tears she had wept and with the tears she had still to weep. Prior to this tragic morning Jim had not spoken to her upon the subject of Lord Cheriton, but the ruthless Aunt Caroline had lost no time in imbuing her with a sense of duty. All too soon the golden age had ended. Somehow she felt that she would never climb the mountains again.

In obedience to Aunt Caroline's strict command she had told Muffin nothing of the tragedy. That practical-minded person and uncommonly sound sleeper had been awakened six times during the night by Goose's low sobs and convulsive caresses. On each occasion she had given Goose a hug in return, had told her not to be a silly, and had immediately gone to sleep again.

When daylight came and Muffin really awoke to find her sister in a state of great distress, her acute intelligence at once began to seek a remedy.

"I will stay with Aunt Caroline," said Muffin, "if she will have me and you shall go back, Goose darling, to Slo-cum Magna to dearest papa. But if you do, you must promise to feed my rabbits, because Milly always forgets them. Now dry your eyes and don't be a silly."

Goose faithfully promised to feed the rabbits if she

went back to Slocum Magna, but she was by no means sure that Aunt Caroline would let her go.

Up till the departure of the eleven o'clock train Araminta put forth heroic efforts to be brave. She did not wholly succeed; but when a little before seven A. M. she beheld Jim Lascelles striding towards them across the mountain side, in response to his cheery "Hallo, you there!" she contrived to greet him in something of the true Widdiford manner.

In the opinion of Jim Lascelles the first thing necessary was to get rid of Muffin for an hour. And this was quite easy, for the devotion of that practical mind to the fauna and flora of the neighborhood often caused her to spend an hour in the investigation of a dozen square yards of the Welsh principality.

Upon this fateful morning less than a third of Gwydr had been climbed when a profusion of rare ferns and mosses claimed Muffin's attention. Jim walked briskly forward, one hand firmly holding the docile sleeve of the Goose Girl.

"Come on," he said, with an affectation of gayety that did him credit. "Let us leave that Ragamuffin. In she goes, right over her ankles into the mud. Torn a great piece out of her skirt on a brier. By the way, Goose Girl, has Aunt Caroline said anything to you upon the subject of Lord Cheriton?"

Mournfully enough the Goose Girl confessed that Aunt Caroline had.

"Well, you must buck up, you know," said Jim cheerily. "You are going to be a countess and the family of Wakefield—Slocum Magna, I mean—will come again into its own."

Miss Perry's only reply was to break forth into a succession of slow-drawn sobs, which were so heavy and majestic that Jim declared they shook the mountain.

“Here is a dry place,” said he. “Let us sit down before you do some damage to the scenery.”

They sat down together upon Gwydr, with the chill mists enfolding them. For twenty minutes the Goose Girl said nothing, but merely sobbed to herself slowly and softly with the daffodil-colored mane pressed against Jim’s shoulder. Such depth and power had the Goose Girl’s emotion that it really seemed to Jim Lascelles that, had her heart not been a particularly robust organ, it must have been broken in pieces.

“I am afraid,” said Jim miserably, “I have been rather a cad for leading you on, you great silly Goose.”

Miss Perry flung her arms about Jim’s neck with such force and suddenness that she nearly toppled him backwards over a precipice.

“Jim,” she sobbed, “you m–must m–marry M–Muffin.”

As Jim was in the toils of a hug that almost forbade him to breathe, he was not able to answer at once.

“That Ragamuffin!” said Jim, as soon as he was able to do so.

“She is t–too s–sweet,” sobbed Miss Perry.

“You Goose!” said Jim. “Give me a kiss, you great Goose.”

Miss Perry proceeded to do so.

“That Ragamuffin doesn’t know about it, does she?”

“Oh no. Aunt Caroline said she was not to.”

“That is a wise old woman. Quite right for the Ragamuffin not to know about it. She is too young. Now dry those Eye Pieces and don’t be a gaby. Old man Cheriton is a very nice, kind, fatherly old gentleman.”

“He is a dear,” said Miss Perry with a loyalty that Jim was forced to admire.

“You are really a very lucky Goose, you know,” said Jim. “You will have a nice kind old gentleman to take you to parties and to the circus. He will give Gunter a

contract for the large size, see if he doesn't. And Dickie will get a living, see if he doesn't; and Charley will go to Sandhurst. As for Papa, you will be able to buy him the *Oxford Dictionary*; Polly is as good as married to her parson; Milly can go to a boarding school at Brighton; I am absolutely confident that the Ragamuffin will have a new mauve frock; and as for Tobias, he will be able to live in Grosvenor Square."

"Do you think so, Jim?" said Miss Perry tearfully.

Jim Lascelles quite covered himself with honor that unhappy morning upon Gwydr. For without a doubt Aunt Caroline had knocked the bottom out of his little world. He had been tumbled out of his fool's paradise in such a ruthless fashion that he really didn't know how he was going to get over the fall.

From his earliest youth he had had an affection for the Goose Girl. He had bled for her, for one thing. And now that she had blossomed out into a gorgeous being who had conquered the town, she had become so much a part of his fortunes that it was impossible to dissociate them from her. The portrait he had painted of her had absorbed all he had to give. But for her it could never have been wrought. Such a work was composed of living tissue. It was almost more than flesh and blood could bear to be told in a few blunt words that this source of inspiration must be a fountain sealed from that time on.

However, he went through with his ordeal as well as in him lay. Great had been his folly that he had ever come to inhabit his paradise at all. And now that he was tumbled out of it forever, it behooved him to see that he made no cry over his bruises, if only because that other foolish simpleton was striving not to cry over hers.

The departure from the railway station at Dwygyfy was a seemly affair. The Castle omnibus, a reputed con-

temporary of the Ark, bore Muffin in state. She was accompanied, of course, by Polly's dress basket, marked "M. P." in white letters on a black ground; and was also accompanied by Miss Burden, Ponto, Lord Cheriton and the dismal Goose. On the way through Pen-y-Gros village they picked up Jim and his mother and their belongings, including the half-finished picture of the Naiad.

Muffin herself was in high feather. For the first time in her life she found herself a person of means and position. Aunt Caroline had marked her esteem for her character and conduct by presenting her with a bank note for ten pounds. Muffin, with that practical sagacity which always distinguished her intercourse with the world, was at first uncertain in what manner to convey this royal gift to Slocum Magna. Eventually she secreted it in her right stocking.

Upon the down platform at Dwygyfy Junction the Goose Girl showed great fortitude. Jim wished at first that she had not come. But she contrived to restrain her feelings nobly, as of course was only to be expected of one of a clan which had gone so often to the scaffold. In consequence, they were able to snatch a few brief, inexpressibly sad, yet tender moments before the train arrived from Talyfaln.

"You are a good and brave Goose," whispered Jim, "And a lucky Goose too. But you must come one day to see us humble suburbans, and we will lay down a red carpet for you, and in every way we will do our best. Because, you know, you are going to be very grand indeed."

"I don't want to be grand, J-Jim." The tears of the Goose Girl were still imminent.

"Now here's a great idea. Persuade my lord to buy the Red House at Widdiford and then ask me and my old



mother to come and stay with you. We will give them such a roasting at the Vicarage—especially that girl Polly—as they have not had for many moons.”

Somehow this bold scheme appeared to infuse a ray of hope in the forlorn heart of Miss Perry.

“Jim,” said she, and her voice had a thrill in it, “perhaps Lord Cheriton might buy the Red House for you and Muffin.”

“Or perhaps pigs might fly,” said Jim.

“You will marry Muffin, won’t you? P-r-romise me, Jim, that you will.”

“What’s the good, you Goose, of my p-r-romising to marry the Ragamuffin? How do you suppose a poor painting chap who lives at Laxton with his old mother can marry into a family with a real live countess in it? What do you suppose that girl Polly would have to say upon the subject?”

This great idea, however, had insinuated itself into the Goose Girl’s slow-moving and tenacious mind, and of course it stuck there.

“Jim,” said she, just as the signal fell for the train from Talyfaln, and the solemn conviction of her tone was such that Jim was forced to laugh in spite of his misery, “Jim,” said she, “I am sure Muffin would love to marry you. And it would be *too* nice. I shall write to dearest papa about it.”

Before Jim could make a fitting reply the train from Talyfaln came snorting and rattling in with quite a display of unnecessary violence. Jim had to look after the luggage, while Lord Cheriton with accustomed gallantry handed Jim’s mother, her red umbrella and her French novel into a third-class compartment.

Muffin personally supervised the entrance of Polly’s dress basket into the luggage van and gave the porter two-pence out of her chain purse.

“Get in, you Ragamuffin,” said Jim sternly, “unless you want to be left behind.”

Muffin gave her sister, who was forlornly witnessing these operations, a final hug and received one in return. She was then handed with considerable ceremony into Mrs. Lascelles' compartment.

Jim tipped the porter and then had a craving to kiss the Goose Girl, but did not quite know how to do so as the down platform at Dwygfy Junction is a decidedly public place. Therefore he had to be content with squeezing her hand.

“Now remember,” were his last whispered words, “you are a very lucky Goose Girl indeed. And your papa and Polly and Milly and all of them are going to be awfully proud of you. And if you forget The Acacias at Laxton my old mother will never forgive you.”

As Jim came aboard his patron shook him warmly by the hand.

“Good-by, Lascelles,” said he. “I hope there will be some entertaining at Cheriton House before long. May we count on Mrs. Lascelles and yourself to stand by us? And when the masterpiece is quite finished please let me know, and I will tell you what to do with it.”

The guard slammed the door and blew his whistle. As the train moved off the window of the third-class compartment was occupied by an expansive vision in mauve, waving affectionate farewells to a group of three persons and a small dog assembled on the platform. They all stood watching it, until the sunlight was cheated suddenly of the daffodil-colored mane gleaming from under the Slocum Magna cucumber basket by the jaws of the tunnel immediately outside Dwygyfy Station, which is two miles and a quarter in length.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### DISINTEGRATION

FROM the fell hour the train steamed away from Dwygyfy Junction there was no more decent weather. Day after day it thundered and lightened, it hailed and it blew, day after day it poured in torrents. For a whole week Cheriton endured this distemper of the Welsh climate. His servant then packed his things, and the pair of them were spirited away upon an extremely inclement morning by the eleven o'clock train. Scotland was their destination. In that land of cakes and heather were some old friends who set apart September for the shooting of divers small birds.

Of course, before Cheriton went up to Scotland he freely discussed his proposed matrimonial adventure with the sagacious Caroline. She even went so far as to affirm that the man Lascelles had behaved like a gentleman, although it was only in very rare instances that she gave a testimonial of that kind.

As became a man of leisure, Cheriton was in no indecent haste to marry Miss Perry. In fact, he did not propose to marry her until the spring. Caroline was inclined to demur. She was not one to let the grass grow under her feet. Besides, Cheriton might change his mind, or a hundred things might happen. Stability, at any rate, was not his *forte*.

"No, my dear Caroline," said a sagacity nowise less than her own, "to my mind the creature is still a little undeveloped. A few months more of the great world so

that she may acquire a deeper sense of responsibility will do her no harm. Besides, spring, the vernal season, is Nature's own appointed wedding-day."

Caroline, of course, did not concur. It only remained for her, however, to acquiesce ungraciously. Yet there was one thing she could do, and this she did. She sent for her lawyer to have the terms of the nuptial contract set out in form. Her old and trusted legal adviser, Mr. Giles Grabham, of Messrs. Pettigrew, Grabham, Grabham and Horrobin, of Old Squire, Lincoln's Inn, spent two nights and a day at Pen-y-Gros Castle and placed the matter on a comprehensive basis. Cheriton appeared to derive a great deal of amusement from the whole proceeding. However, he was prevailed upon to affix what Mr. Grabham called "a provisional signature to the memorandum."

Copies were engrossed of what Mr. Grabham called the instrument by the clerical staff to Messrs. Pettigrew, Grabham, Grabham and Horrobin, one of which was duly forwarded to Lord Cheriton at Pen-y-Gros Castle, North Wales, two days after his lordship's departure from the principality. It was accompanied by another one addressed to the Countess of Crewkerne.

Upon the arrival of these documents Miss Perry was commanded by Aunt Caroline to write to her papa to announce the signal honor that had been done her, and to inclose a copy of the deed of settlement for his sanction and signature. In obedience to the behest, with infinite difficulty and many tears, Miss Perry composed the following:—

*Papa Dearest,—Aunt Caroline desires me to inform you that her old friend the Earl of Cheriton does me the honor of wishing to marry me—that is, Papa Dearest, if you have no objection. Aunt Caroline desires me to say*

*that in her judgment there can be no possible objection to Lord Cheriton doing so, as he is a man of considerable wealth, his life has been worthy, and she has known him herself personally for nearly fifty years. Aunt Caroline desires me to inclose this copy of the deed of settlement, which she hopes you will approve and return to her with your signature. With fondest love, Papa Dearest, and twelve kisses, which I inclose XXXXXXXXXXXXX. Believe me to remain your most Dutiful and Affectionate Daughter,*

ARAMINTA.

*P.S.—Have you any objection to Muffin marrying Jim Lascelles, who used to live at the Red House at Widdiford?*

The more formal part of the letter had been written to Aunt Caroline's dictation. She inspected the finished performance grimly. The writing was large and round and as transparently simple as Miss Perry's own countenance, and it was blotted freely with tears. In its way it was a human document, and as such Aunt Caroline decided that it should be sent. Miss Perry was not the first Wargrave who had been consigned to the scaffold, and doubtless she would not be the last.

A week passed before a reply came to Pen-y-Gros Castle, and even then it was unaccompanied by the copy of the deed. The letter of the Reverend Aloysius Perry was as follows:—

*My dear Daughter,—Your letter came to me as a great surprise. Firstly, I should like to express to your Aunt Caroline the deep sense of obligation we are all laid under in regard to her, not only in the matter of her very great*

kindness to you personally, but also for the great kindness and consideration extended to Elizabeth during her month's sojourn at Pen-y-Gros Castle. Elizabeth cannot find enough to say in her praise.

Now in regard to yourself, my dear Araminta, while I recognize to the full the dazzling nature of your prospects, and I do not know how to thank your Aunt Caroline for her princely suggestion, I want you to believe, and I want her to believe also, that I have no other thought and no other desire than whatever course you take shall lead to your ultimate and permanent happiness. That above everything is what I desire. I have refrained from attaching my signature to the Deed which your Aunt has been so kind as to send to me, for while I am sensible of her generosity and her munificence, I shall like to have your own assurance, my dear Daughter, that you are consulting your own highest welfare and happiness irrespective of that of any one else. I trust your Aunt will not consider me lacking in gratitude or in common sense. Please write to me again upon the subject, and believe me to remain, your affectionate father,

ALOYSIUS PERRY.

Aunt Caroline snorted a good deal when she read this letter. She declared it was so like a parson to say a great deal more than he need in order to express a great deal less than he ought. However, she was quite ruthless upon the subject. Araminta was ordered to allay the scruples of her father; and this the unhappy Goose Girl did with many private tears, to her aunt's dictation.

In due course the document was returned with her father's signature. Then she felt that indeed her doom was sealed. She was a most docile and duteous creature, and even Aunt Caroline admitted it; but her appetite de-

clined, her laugh lost its gayety, her youth its irresponsible charm. Life suddenly became a dreary routine.

Jim had his bad time too. He returned to The Acacias with his mother fully determined to maintain the tripartite rôle of a Lascelles, a hero, and a gentleman. He determined to undertake the superhuman task of behaving as though the Goose Girl had no place in his life whatever.

Alas! for the vanity of human resolves. The first thing he did upon his return home was to take the studio key off the sitting-room chimney piece in order to bestow a few final touches upon a work which by now was hardly in need of them. He deluded himself with the idea that he was about to prove to himself how strong he was, and that by the mere exercise of the will an unforgettable image might be cut away from the living tissue of his thoughts.

Alas! it could not be done. Jim Lascelles failed dismally to assert the mind's dominion. A strange excitement came upon him, and for several days he worked in quite a frenzy of enthusiasm, modifying this, painting out that, heightening and enhancing the other. It was solace of a dangerous kind. He performed surprising feats, it is true; his color grew more and more audacious, only to be harmonized marvelously, but he could not sleep at night. He came down to breakfast haggard and wild-eyed and looking rather more unstrung than when, in the small hours of the morning, he had gone to bed.

He had determined to withhold from his mother the true state of the case. But he had hopelessly underrated the *flair* of the genus. Very soon she had the truth out of him; and, without letting Jim see her concern, she grew alarmed. Yet she was not in the least surprised. From the first she had foreseen that this was a turn the thing was almost bound to take. Had it not been Lord Cheriton, it must have been another. For the Goose, not-

withstanding her limited capacity, was an absurdly regal creature, one of those oddly-compounded, solemn, un-aspiring works designed by Nature for a gorgeous setting, who by a kind of sovereign right command a splendid destiny.

Jim's mother blamed herself, as mothers are apt to do, although she really had no part in Jim's tragedy. She had merely lent a kind of whimsical sanction to a young man's dream in order primarily to give him a zest in his work. The consequences were indeed melancholy, but in any case the responsibility for laying the mine was not hers, any more than it was Cheriton's for applying the match.

"Had it not been one, my dear boy," said Mrs. Lascelles philosophically, "it would have been the other. Had I ventured to prophesy I should have said that Destiny would have insisted on making her a duchess. Not that that matters. Lord Cheriton will certainly be very good to her, although there is little consolation in that."

Precious little consolation in Jim's opinion. By the time October came he was but a shadow of himself, and the masterpiece was finally complete. His mother was alarmed for him then. She suggested a voyage to Spain and a visit to the Prado, so that he might pay homage at the shrine of the great Velasquez. The suggestion was sound, but unhappily it did not come within the range of practical politics. They had no money. Mrs. Lascelles was overdrawn at the bank and Jim was in debt.

"Tell Lord Cheriton his picture is complete, and dun him for the price of it."

"No, my dear," said Jim with a dour shake of the head, "we must look to that little effort to keep a roof over our heads during the winter."

His mother showed a most resolute optimism.

"Lay out every penny of the money on a visit to Spain.



my son. Velasquez will inspire you. You will return with a cubit added to your stature; you will finish the Naiad triumphantly, and once you have done that you will have convinced the world you can paint."

"And in the meantime, my dear, what about the rint?"

"Oh, that," said his mother airily—"that can take care of itself. Besides, I dreamed last night that the publishers had accepted *The Fair Immortal*."

"Not quite the same thing, my dear, as receiving a check for it," said Jim gloomily.

It would seem, however, that Providence was keeping an eye on The Acacias. For the very next morning brought a solution of the difficulty. The marquis wrote from Yorkshire to suggest that during the following week, if convenient to himself, Mr. Lascelles should come to Barne Moor, as previously arranged, to paint the fair Priscilla.

It appeared that in the stress of circumstance both Jim and his mother had forgotten the Yorkshire marquis and the fair Priscilla.

"And it means a cool five hundred, too," said Jim, with a little pardonable uplift. "The terms are arranged already, thanks to that old sportsman who is really the oddest mixture of a human being I have ever met."

And then Jim gave a groan, for he remembered that it was upon the strength of this important commission he had made up his mind to take the plunge with the Goose Girl. The next moment he was cursing himself for being so flabby.

"You will never be the least use in this world, James Lascelles, my son," was the burden of his reflections, "if you can't take a facer or two. Every time Fate knocks you down you have to come up smiling, or you will certainly never be a Velasquez."

Mrs. Lascelles was overjoyed by the providential letter

from Yorkshire. She blessed the marquis and all his acres. She insisted that Jim should write by the next post to announce his intention of coming to Barne Moor on the following Monday. And, in order that there should be no possible doubt about the matter, she put on her hat, although it was raining hard, and sallied forth to the stationer's shop at the corner of Chestnut Road and invested one of her few remaining sixpences in a *Bradshaw's Guide*.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### BARNE MOOR

**A**BOUT tea-time on the Monday following Jim Lascelles found himself at Barne Moor. The house was a bleak, upstanding place in the north of Yorkshire. It was on the edge of the moors, and although its size was impressive, architecturally it was hideous.

All the way up from London Jim had been very unhappy. The change of scene, however, raised his spirits a little. Definite employment and a prospect of five hundred pounds were also stimulating. As soon as he set foot in the house there was a great surprise in store.

Almost the first person he saw was the Goose Girl. She had been out with the guns, and was now consuming tea and hot buttered cakes. It was nearly six weeks since they had parted in Wales. In that time each had changed. But with his artist's eye Jim could not help noticing that she was still the elemental creature of the Devonshire lanes. Her candor and simplicity were hardly less than they had always been, but somewhere deep down was a kind of reserved inclosure which only those who held her secret would ever be able to discover.

Jim Lascelles may have been glad to perceive that. She was true blue. There was nothing in her words and very little in the manner of her greeting to suggest that one so primitive as herself had these hidden depths. She was just as she always had been, yet at her first words of greeting Jim knew she was much more.

“Why, it’s Jim!” she exclaimed in just the old way; and putting her cake in her saucer, she said, “I can’t shake hands with you, Jim, because my fingers are all over butter.”

Jim hardly knew whether to rejoice at her presence or to be dismayed.

“Why, Goose Girl, whoever could have thought of seeing you here!”

“Aunt Caroline is here. And Miss Burden. And Lord Cheriton too.”

“How odd that we should meet again like this!”

Yet it was scarcely so odd as Jim thought it was. Aunt Caroline, in spite of her years and her increasing difficult temper, had still certain houses open to her, and of these Barne Moor was one. Her store of energy was by no means exhausted; she liked still to keep in the world, to know what was doing; and she liked her rubber. An old habitu  of Barne Moor, as soon as Wales began to bore her she resolutely turned her face in the direction of that caravanserai, because she knew that it was about to hold a choice collection of her friends and her enemies, and would be far more diverting than Pen-y-Gros or London itself in the absence of Parliament.

At Barne Moor, of course, Jim was a nobody. His hostess, like Caroline Crewkerne herself, was of the strain of a former Whig oligarchy, as were so many to be found under that ample roof. She was not so much exclusive as quite indifferent to those outside the magic circle. She was a ponderous, neutral kind of woman, with very definite views about religion and a bit of a bully *au fond*. From the first Jim Lascelles did not find her at all easy to get on with. Perhaps he did not try to get on with her particularly.

However, during the time Jim spent at Barne Moor things did not go amiss. The Goose Girl was still the

child of Nature she had always been. The old woman of Hill Street was reasonably civil; quite as civil, in point of fact, as Jim expected her to be. Miss Burden in her charmingly delicate way showed that she understood the tragedy. As for Cheriton, who was an old friend of the house, and for some reason high in the esteem of all, he extended the same genial kindness to his *protégé* that he had always done.

Among the score or so people gathered under Barne Moor's hospitable roof Jim's only other acquaintance was George Betterton. No announcement had yet been made, but it was common knowledge that "an arrangement" was likely to be forthcoming with a daughter of the house.

Jim Lascelles opined that "the old sportsman" knew his own business best, but he rather hoped "it wouldn't come off." In Jim's opinion his Grace was a genuine fellow, while personally the young man had little admiration for the fair Priscilla. For one thing, he had to paint her to order; and that, of course, did not tell in her favor with the temperament of genius.

She had not the least sense of pose. She was just a wooden sort of Englishwoman, as neutral as her mother, who clipped her "g's" and powdered her nose, with dull red hair and pale green eyes, who took very little interest in anything or anybody. But she shot well and rode well and went to Church twice every Sunday.

She sat half a dozen times, and the rising artist did what he could with her. Jim's special talent lay in his use of color and his sense of values. He took the dark oak of the gloomy old library for a background, and he painted Priscilla's hair a warm and glowing Titian red, with a striking pallor for the face, and for the eyes a shade of blue which was extremely daring but successful. The portrait in its distinction and its style was absurdly unlike Priscilla herself; yet somehow it resembled her sufficiently

to pass muster with those who cared more for that young woman than they did for her counterfeit presentment.

About the fifth day of Jim's stay Cheriton announced that the picture of Priscilla was going to turn out very fine. He publicly exhorted his friend Kendal to send it to the next Royal Academy exhibition, and complimented him upon having had the foresight and good sense to obtain the man of the future to do the work. The bullet-headed Yorkshireman was pleased, of course, since every bullet-headed Yorkshireman likes to be complimented on his foresight and good sense by an acknowledged expert.

"I wonder if he would paint my wife?" said Mr. Crosby of the Foreign Office.

"You can ask him, my dear fellow," said the expert.

"He'd want a stiff figure, wouldn't he?" said Mr. Crosby, who had a very practical mind.

"It would cost you a cool thousand, I dare say," said Cheriton before the host could announce that it had cost him five hundred.

"Stiff, ain't it, for an unknown man?"

"He is going to be *the* man, my dear fellow. What do you say, Caroline? You have seen some of his work."

"I agree with you, Cheriton," said the flattered Caroline, who knew as much about pictures as Ponto did. "He has painted two of my nieces, and in my opinion they are excellent likenesses."

"Have you *two* nieces, Caroline?" said the Marquis. "That is interesting. When are we to have the privilege of seeing the other one?"

"Next season—perhaps."

As yet there had been no formal announcement of Cheriton's engagement, but the fact had leaked out. It is true that those who knew him best maintained an attitude of polite incredulity. So many times in the past had there been talk of entertaining at Cheriton House.

Yet there was a concensus of opinion that he really meant to settle down at last; and while none could fail to admire his taste, there were those who doubted his wisdom. Still, Miss Perry had charm and great beauty. Moreover, she was a good, honest girl, a Wargrave, and the old woman of Hill Street could well afford to behave handsomely. Even if the knowing ones "could not see it at all," they were obliged to own that "Cheriton might have done worse."

All the same, Miss Perry was famous and she was popular. Such a nature as hers was very rare. She was unaffectedly good to everybody, and everybody could not help being grateful to her for her goodness, because it came straight from the heart. No matter whether people were important or unimportant, it made no difference. Supreme beauty and an absolute friendliness which is extended to all, which keeps the same gracious smile for the odd man about the stables as for the wearer of the Garter, will go far towards the conquest of the world.

Miss Perry had conquered her world. All agreed that her good luck was thoroughly deserved. Yet the creature was not in the least happy. In the course of centuries, however, so much practice had befallen those of her race in dissembling their unhappiness and in offering their heads to the block, that only four persons were able to suspect that a brave, smiling and bountiful exterior concealed a broken heart.

Jim Lascelles was one. He knew for certain. Miss Burden was another. Caroline Crewkerne was no believer in broken hearts. For one thing she had never had a heart of any sort to break. But she had seen those great damp splotches on the correspondence with the creature's father; she had noticed that her appetite was not what it was; and there were other symptoms that enabled her to put two and two together. As for the

fourth person, it was Cheriton himself. He was a man of immense practical sagacity. The Lascelles affair was quite familiar to him in all its aspects. Was he not primarily responsible for it? And none knew better than did he that youth will be served.

During Jim's stay at Barne Moor Cheriton showed him much kindness. His behavior was that of a highly-civilized and broad-minded man of the world, who, so to speak, knew the whole alphabet of life, and if necessary could repeat it backwards.

"You have no right to be here, my dear fellow," was what he said in effect; "but since our Yorkshire friend has blundered, as one's Yorkshire friends will, and you find yourself in the wrong galley, act as you would in ordinary circumstances, and, if you have the courage, take up the parable more or less where you left it. After all, you were brought up together, and I am only an interloper, and an old one at that."

It was bold and generous of my lord to adopt this course. But the young man had behaved so well that he was bound to respect him. And he had a genuine liking for him too. Therefore he raised no objection to their spending long hours upon the moors with only one another for company, while he gossiped and shot birds and passed the time indoors among people rather more mature.

Still, it was trying Jim Lascelles somewhat highly. The test was a severer one than perhaps Cheriton knew. For Jim was confident that he had only to speak the word for the Goose Girl to marry him by special license at Barne Moor parish church. Once, indeed, they found themselves in it, since the Goose Girl was by way of being a connoisseur in churches; and they had a pleasant and instructive conversation with the verger.

However, "all's well that ends well," as Shakespeare says. Jim Lascelles did not obtain a special license, but



returned to his mother like a dutiful son and a man of honor. For it would have been such a fatally easy and natural thing to marry the Goose Girl at Barne Moor parish church. After all, why should she more than another be offered for sacrifice? Dickie would be able to go to Sandhurst and Milly to boarding school; all the same, it was desperately hard on the Goose Girl.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### EVERYTHING FOR THE BEST IN THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

**J**IM LASCELLES returned to Laxton exactly nine days after he had left that friendly but uninspired suburb. He had worked hard during his absence in Yorkshire; the picture of the fair Priscilla had made excellent progress, and there was a check for five hundred pounds in prospect on completion. Further, by the interest and undoubted talent for commerce of his friend Lord Cheriton, Mr. Crosby of the Foreign Office had been induced to rise to seven hundred and fifty pounds for the portrait of Mrs. Crosby and her children.

As far as the things of this world are concerned, Jim returned to his mother in high feather. The progress he was making in his profession seemed out of all proportion to his talent. But it is a great thing to have a friend at Court. So much is done in that way. It is not always the best picture or the best play or the best oratorio that commands the most guineas in the market square. It is one thing to create a masterpiece, it is quite another to transmute it into coin of the realm. Jim Lascelles had made amazing strides in his art, beyond a doubt; all the same, he was a lucky fellow to have a man like Cheriton to go round with a bell to call the attention of the picture-buying public to the quality of his work.

Jim was very grateful to the chief of his patrons. And yet he would have been less than human had he not hated him very sorely. After all, what is the use of

material prosperity if the man who confers it upon you robs you of the only girl in the world you feel you will ever be able to marry? Certainly he would now have the means to buy his mother a new frock or so in order to deprive her of a favorite excuse for not looking older. But life, even with professional success, was going to be a hollow affair.

However, in this crisis Jim Lascelles proved himself a man. Of late he had been down to the depths of the sea and had brought back a few pearls. One of these was resolution. He finished the picture of Priscilla out of hand and drew his check; and although the season was November, he paid several visits to Eaton Square and did his best for Mrs. Crosby and her youthful family. And ever and anon he took his courage in his hands and spent an hour in further devotion to the masterpiece that was to make him famous.

It was not until early in January that Jim Lascelles announced to his patron that the portrait of Miss Perry was complete. Thereupon quite a number of people interested in art found their way to The Acacias. They were by no means unanimous as to the intrinsic merit of the portrait, but all agreed that it was bound to prove one of the sensations of the year.

"An extraordinarily clever fake," said a critic of the fine arts privately.

"Mr. Lascelles," said a dealer, "I should like you to give me an option on all the work you produce during the next five years. I feel sure I could sell it."

"We have a new Gainsborough here," said a third person, who spoke in an unofficial capacity, "and that is all there is to be said about it."

Towards the end of the month Cheriton himself appeared, duly armed with expert opinion. He was accompanied by Miss Burden and his *fiancée*, who was looking

thin and unhappy. It was a beautiful day for the time of year, and in the matter of his appearance the happy wooer was as fastidious as usual. Never had he seemed more faultless in dress or in mien more scrupulously paternal. He looked long at the masterpiece and he looked particularly.

"Lascelles, my good fellow," said he, "I am forced to arrive at one conclusion. If you were to paint a thousand pictures, this is something you will never surpass."

Jim asked why he thought so.

"Because there is growth in it. You began it a raw youth; you have finished it, shall I say, a strong man in the fullness of his power. Month by month I have watched you and the picture grow together. It is given to no man to do that sort of thing twice."

Jim Lascelles, however, was a robust young man—at least it was his ideal to be so. He was apt to be on his guard against high-flown sentiment, yet he knew that Cheriton had spoken the truth.

"You are quite right, sir," he said simply. "That canvas has got all I have or ever shall have. I am older now than when I began it, and I hope I'm wiser."

"Does one ever get wiser? But at any rate you have found yourself. A great career lies before you."

"You may be right, sir," said Jim, "or you may not be right, but either way it doesn't matter."

My lord looked at his *protégé* searchingly. There was no mistaking the note of tragedy in the young man's voice. So much was painfully clear. He took a little time for reflection, and then he slowly drew a check out of his pocketbook.

"There must be no misunderstanding, Lascelles," said he, with an air that was brisk and businesslike. "There is every reason to believe that the picture of Miss Perry will prove a valuable property. But at the same time, I

hold your promise that I may purchase it on my own terms. Is not that the case?"

"It is, Lord Cheriton," said Jim in a tone of indifference.

"I hope the bargain I drove with you may not prove too hard," said Cheriton with an enigmatic smile that Jim Lascelles was at no pains to fathom. "But if I may say so, in allowing me to drive it you were most injudicious. For everybody tells me that your picture is magnificent."

"I am so glad you like it," said Jim perfunctorily.

"It must always be pleasant to an artist to have his work admired. My own comment upon your work is this. I hope, my dear fellow, you will be able to forgive its extravagance."

As he spoke he gave the check to Jim Lascelles. The painter, however, paid no heed to it at first. So repugnant was the piece of paper to his fingers that his instinct was to crush it in them and fling it away. Now that the time had come to yield the one solace that remained he felt unable to give it up.

This, however, was a weakness he must not indulge. Automatically his eye fell on the paper, and then he gave an exclamation. The check was made out in his favor for ten thousand pounds.

"I don't understand," said Jim. "Is there not some mistake?"

"You must constrain your modesty a little, that is all. People tell me it will be worth every penny of this sum to the next generation. It is pleasant sometimes to anticipate the verdict of posterity."

Jim Lascelles did not know what to say or what to do. He was confronted by the most Quixotic proceeding he had ever heard of.

"Really," he said, "I don't think I ought to take such a sum."

"A bargain is a bargain. I have your promise that I am to buy the picture on my own terms."

In the flood tide of bewilderment Jim Lascelles could find nothing to say.

"Don't forget, my friend, that there is no greater pleasure for any man than to be allowed to adopt the rôle of Mæcenas. And don't you know that the Red House at Widdiford is in the market, and that six thousand pounds will purchase it?"

Jim flinched a little. A deep flush overspread his face. This was sacred ground, upon which it behooved the outside world to tread warily.

"I hope you don't wish to infer that the Red House at Widdiford means nothing to you?"

Jim was not proof against the assault.

"I'm not sure that it does," he said miserably.

"Don't be too sure about that, my dear fellow."

Jim began to look decidedly fierce. In spite of the check for ten thousand pounds, which after all was little better than a mockery, he was not going to be baited.

"Perhaps, sir, it would be better not to pursue the subject."

Cheriton laughed outright at the young man's solemnity.

"On the contrary," he said, "one rather feels that the Red House at Widdiford is a subject for discussion. You may like to know that Miss Perry and I have just been over to look at the property before completing the purchase."

Jim, who was more bewildered than ever, allowed that such a fact was interesting.

"It seems that as well as other lures the Red House at Widdiford has peaches in season."

"Of course it has," said Jim, who was beginning to

feel that his patron was making a rather tedious excursion in the realms of bad taste.

“Well, my dear fellow, I put it to you—what is the use of having peaches in season if one has not the appetite to eat them?”

“What, indeed!” said Jim.

“And again, my dear fellow—what, pray, is the use of giving Gunter a contract for the large size when even cream buns lose their charm?”

Jim’s only reply was to continue to look miserable.

“Let me tell you in confidence, Lascelles, that even the circus has begun to pall. And as for Joseph Wright of Derby, the question of his permanent merit is becoming almost a matter of indifference. Do you feel competent to give advice as to what ought to be done?”

“I’m afraid, sir, I don’t,” said Jim rather feebly.

“That is disappointing, for in the past you have shown such a fertility of ideas. The problem is so serious. Can one conceive a world in which cream buns have no attraction, circuses no glamour, and in which the Joseph Wrights of Derby are allowed to ruffle it unchallenged among their betters? Frankly, the feat is beyond me, Lascelles. And then, too, my dear fellow, the news that Muffin is to have a new mauve frock from London to wear in the spring has excited hardly any enthusiasm.”

Jim expressed a formal surprise.

“That is so, I assure you. And to my mind it is not the least sinister sign. I have conferred with the wise woman of Hill Street, and during my sojourn in the West-country also with the presiding genius of Slocum Magna. After some discussion of the pros and cons of the situation, for *mon père* and *ma tante* do not appear to see eye to eye in all things, we are at last in agreement that steps ought to be taken to restore the savor to the best confectionery, and also to ensure that no upstart

shall occupy without challenge the same kind of fauteuil as Rembrandt and Velasquez. The result of our deliberations is, my friend, that we have come to the conclusion that you are the man to help us."

"I," said Jim impotently.

"Have you any objection to undertaking such a scheme of philanthropy?"

"If I could do anything to add to Miss Perry's happiness," said Jim, "I should be just about the proudest chap in the world."

"Well, it seems, my friend, that you can do so. At least, that is the opinion which has been reached by the experts who have communed over her case."

Jim's heart beat painfully.

"Tell me what I can do," he said rather hoarsely, "for the best, the truest-hearted, the most absolutely genuine girl in the world."

"You can marry her."

"Marry her!" gasped Jim.

"Yes, in the afternoon of April the First, at Saint Sepulchre's Church."

"But—" said Jim.

"The oracle of Hill Street thinks the First of June is preferable, because there will be more people in town, and the presents are likely to be more numerous. But privately I agree with Mrs. Lascelles and *mon père* that April is as good a time as any other for visiting the Prado."

"But—" said Jim.

"I forget the inn I stayed at when I was last at Madrid. It was 'El' Something, and for some obscure reason it had no aspirate. But one Ford is the authority for Spain, although to be sure a certain Borrow wrote a famous work upon the subject. By the way, we must not overlook one important argument in favor of June."



“What is that, sir?” said Jim mechanically.

“It is hardly right to expect a new mauve dress to make its *début* on the First of April. Yet there seems no help for it. No ceremony could ever be complete without it.”

“Am I to understand—?” began Jim, but he stopped with ridiculous abruptness right in the middle of his question.

“By the way, my dear fellow, I have taken the liberty of suggesting to your accomplished mother that it might help her literary career if she moved a little nearer to the center. A flat in Knightsbridge is sometimes a judicious investment. As you may know, publishers as a race are highly susceptible, and an address in Knightsbridge might impress them favorably.”

“Do you think so, sir?” said Jim, who did not know in the least what he was saying.

But there is really no reason to go on with this history. In spite of scruples, which were due as much to pride as to generosity, Jim Lascelles married the Goose Girl at Saint Sepulchre’s Church on the First of April. On that significant occasion the presiding genius of Hill Street displayed an amount of Christian feeling which, in the opinion of a contemporary, was without parallel in his experience.

The entire family of Slocum Magna, including Milly, whose pigtail was the color of a yellow chrysanthemum, and was tied with a ribbon, came up to London and stayed a full week at Morley’s Hotel. Among other things, they all went one day to see the Exhibition, and found there wasn’t one. Papa dined twice in Hill Street and met dukes and people; and he brought back the report that Aunt Caroline was less worldly than he had feared. He gave his daughter away on the glorious First, and Muffin wore her new mauve dress on that occasion. In the opinion of all qualified persons it was quite as successful

as the famous original. Polly, who took after her papa, and had more intellect than all the rest of the family together, Dickie and Doggo included, looked charmingly proper in a "costume" more reticent than Muffin's. Her young man assisted the Dean of Dunstable, the uncle of the bride, in performing the ceremony.

Jim Lascelles and the Goose Girl spent a month in the land of Cervantes and Velasquez. They are living now at the Red House at Widdiford. Jim is quite likely to be elected to an Associateship of the Royal Academy before long. At least, he is getting very good prices for his work, and his "Miss Perry" has been esteemed a rare triumph for British art. His "Naiad" also, purchased by the Chantrey Bequest, has been generally and justly admired.

The accomplished mother of the rising artist took the disinterested advice of a well-wisher, and a fortnight after her son's brilliant marriage—the *Morning Mirror* described it as such—she left "P.P.C." cards on the Miss Champneys at The Chestnuts, and moved "nearer to the center." It may have been coincidence, or it may have been cause and effect, but within a fortnight of her installation at No. 5 Beauclerk Mansions, W., *The Fair Immortal* was accepted by an eminent firm of publishers, and made its appearance in the course of the summer. It won such glowing approval from the Press and the public, that it can now be purchased for sixpence of any self-respecting bookseller in the United Kingdom; its fortunate authoress has signed contracts for the next three years, and has been elected a member of several of the best ladies' clubs in the metropolis.

Muffin's season at Hill Street was an even greater triumph than her sister's—but thereby hangs a tale for a wet afternoon. Aunt Caroline, in spite of her advanced years, is worth "a good many dead ones" at present, and

in the opinion of her oldest friend her manner has more amenity. Perhaps it is that the influence of youth has been a good one in her life. It is right to think so, since there is no reason to believe that she has altered her opinion of the clergy.

Polly has not yet married her parson, but she is certain to do so. Serious people, however, "make haste slowly," as the wise Italians say. Charley has found his way to Sandhurst all right, and feels himself to be a field marshal already. Dickie also is on the high road to preferment—in itself no mean achievement, considering the widespread depression in things ecclesiastical. However, in justice to Dickie, it should be stated that he was always quietly confident that something would come of his left-hand bowling. It is only right to expect it if you break both ways.

Milly has been two terms already at her Brighton boarding school. In the opinion of her mistresses she is the best inside right at hockey on the South Coast. If she is not chosen to play against Wales in the forthcoming international match they will be much disappointed.

Entertaining at Cheriton House is still to seek. The thing threatens to become a national scandal. Comparisons highly unfavorable to the present peer are being constantly drawn by convinced free-fooders and the praisers of past times. The noble earl, however, is fully occupied at present in steering a course between the Scylla of Hill Street on the one hand and the Charybdis of No. 5 Beauclerk Mansions on the other. The presiding genius of the former locality defines a coxcomb as a person who never means anything. Still, it doesn't do to be too sure in these days.

As an instance of the need for honest doubt, George Betterton did not lead the fair Priscilla to the altar after all. The world understands that a religious difference

was the rock which sundered them. Whether George had too little religion and Priscilla had too much is one of those problems that has never been elucidated clearly. But beyond all shadow of controversy they were never brought to the question. Priscilla made quite a good marriage all the same. As for George—well, what really happened to him is a story for one of those typical English afternoons in which it is hardly fit for a dog to be out. People say that George is much improved lately.

It is open to doubt whether Jim Lascelles will make as great a painter as Velasquez. Considering his youth, his attainments and his temper, there were those who predicted a high destiny for the young fellow, but that was before “the wicket rolled out so plumb.” Authorities upon the subject, however, are not slow to aver that it is better to marry the girl you want to, and to live at the Red House at Widdiford, and be a county magistrate, and to have a couple of expensive sons in the Services, and to have your girls clothed by Reville and presented at Court, than to appear on a pedestal by public subscription in front of the National Gallery three centuries after you have ceased to take an interest in the verdict of posterity.

*Quot homines, tot sententiæ.* These wiseacres may be right or they may not be right. It is only the Caroline Crewkernes who are infallible.

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THE END







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